

You call this the “Fairness in Girls’ Sports Act.” But I ask of you, what about this is “fair?”

My name is Richa Tripathi, and I’m a junior at John F. Kennedy High School. I’m a queer, female, student athlete, and I have a lot to say about why this bill should be rejected. Let’s break it down:

1) Gender Participation Experiences

I played on a “co-ed” recreational soccer team for six years straight as the only female player on the team. I was excluded, bullied, ridiculed, and harassed for *six years*. I remember being in gym class in middle school and being excluded from groups playing different sports as a girl trying to play with boys. I told my gym teachers this, and they simply told me to “pick another sport.”

A friend told me that her girl’s volleyball team had to wear leftover men’s jerseys from eight years prior as they didn’t secure funding to get their own jerseys.

I had another friend who told me about being at the state-wide diving championships and seeing female divers getting HUNDREDS of points lower than their male counterparts because the judges were trained to recognize proper movements on the male body.

Sexism is an issue that is so much bigger than your assigned gender at birth. It is an issue of perception— women are perceived as less successful and weak, causing them to get lower scores and less funding, as well as less respect. If you want girls’ sports to be more fair, there are other ways to do it. But it is my belief that the people who don’t want transgender women in sports and pass bills like these to achieve that were never concerned with true fairness in girls’ sports— they were instead focused on barring transgender students from yet another public space with no clear direction for them to go instead.

2) Female Autonomy

It’s not enough to not allow people to question women’s sports, it’s enough to not allow people to question *women* in women’s sports. In not allowing transgender girls to participate in women’s sports, we continue a long history of policing women’s bodies. If she is too fast or not fast enough, she is a target. If she is too tall or not tall enough, she is a target. If she is too athletic or not athletic enough, she is a target. We are promoting a culture that allows people to question even the assigned gender at birth of other people as “fair game” and reasoning as to why she is better or worse than someone else. In passing these measures, we would be setting a dangerous precedent that impacts how ALL women in sports are perceived and subjects her to more intense scrutiny, not just transgender women.

3) Athletes Supporting Transgender Athletes

Here is a [list of some notable women’s sports advocates](#), including distinguished [professional players](#) and reputable organizations, who support transgender athlete participation:

- Kayla Ward
- Imani Dorsey
- Naima Reddick

- Erica Meacham
- Megan Rapinoe
- Billie Jean King
- Anne Lieberman
- The Women's Sports Foundation
- The National Women's Law Center

Additionally, here is the policy on Transgender Athlete Participation from the [United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee website](#): “When considering participation in sport, we rely on fairness as our guiding principle. It is not fair if athletes cannot participate or compete in sport because of their gender identity – participation in sport should be available to everyone.” If the Olympics thinks so, why don't we?

I am a student athlete myself, and I have competed against girls who have been much taller, stronger, and more muscular than me. Yet, I have never once accused them of having an unfair advantage for having what people would consider to be more “masculine” traits. Several people have submitted written testimony today to share their experiences as student athletes, where they all consider transgender athletic participation to be a non-issue, seeing as few of them participate in sports to begin with, so I don't feel the need to elaborate much about this point. Just know that girls who are actually in girls' sports in the modern day don't have a problem with transgender girls participating.

4) Unfair Advantages Based On Identity

Sports aren't fair, and we know this. That's why there are separate leagues based on gender, age, and physical abilities. But what, pray tell, is the greatest [indicator](#) of success in sports? Spoiler alert: It's not being transgender.

The greatest indicator of success in sports, especially at the high school level, is your socioeconomic status. I go to one of the poorest schools in our school district, which consistently ranks last in terms of academic performance in our county. With the rise in club sports, which are incredibly expensive and time-consuming year-round leagues that many athletes are recommended to, there is also a clear disparity between athletic performance in interschool competitions. My swim team is almost never able to beat other swim teams with more club sports participants, for example, as the financial makeup of our neighborhood is fundamentally different than that of the schools we compete against. In short, your scores in competitions are inextricably linked with the income level of your neighborhood, *especially* at the high school level. About [0.005%](#) of youth in Maryland identify as transgender, while [11.6%](#) of children are in poverty, with many more being considered low-income.

Yet, I never hear of a bill with the intention of leveling the playing field for low-income students. If there is really a push to make high school sports more fair, there are other ways to look at it without directly targeting yet another vulnerable minority group.

3) Fairness in Girls' Sports

Rather than barring transgender athletes, who make up an incredibly small percentage of high school sports teams, from participating, here are some other potential measures that would better ensure fairness in high school girls' sports:

- Properly sized and clean uniforms
- Equal funding distributions by athletic departments between male and female teams
- Menstrual products (pads, tampons, medication) available in bathrooms & locker rooms
- Subsidizing of funds not provided by athletic departments for girls' teams in low-income areas and areas that otherwise have a high need
- Proper training of judges, referees, and other impartial officials to ensure that they are trained to accurately score both male and female teams
- Initiatives that support the availability of coaches for female sports teams, as many male sports teams (and thus male athletes) receive more interest from potential coaches
- Overall, promoting a *culture of respect* for female athletes and coaches of girls' teams

Finally, as a gay person third, a woman second, and a human first, I ask you to consider this: **Do you only care about women's sports when a "man" enters them?**