

March 3, 2025

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
3 East Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Testimony

**IN OPPOSITION OF**

**Senate Bill #588:** Education - Interscholastic and Intramural Junior Varsity and Varsity  
Teams and Sports - Designation (Fairness in Girls' Sports Act)

Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the committee,

I am writing to strongly urge an unfavorable report on SB0588, a bill that seeks to exclude transgender youth from participating in sports in alignment with their gender identity. The data overwhelming shows that transgender athletes do not pose a threat to fairness in girls' and women's sports, while the harm caused by exclusion is clear and measurable.

There are roughly 8 million student-athletes in U.S high schools and approximately 510,000 NCAA athletes at the collegiate level. NCAA president Charlie Baker testified that fewer than 10 NCAA athletes are transgender. A recent poll of states athletic bodies by Teen Vogue found only 17 trans girls playing sports at the high school level, averaging 2-3 per state. Even if we extrapolate from NCAA data, that suggests only around 160 trans athletes at that level.

In over a decade of allowing trans women to compete in NCAA athletics, only one openly transgender woman has ever won an NCAA Division 1 championship. Lia Thomas, a swimmer, won the 500-yard freestyle in 2022. Less publicized was her placement of 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> in her other races. Similarly, transgender athletes winning high school championships is exceedingly rare. A handful of highly publicized cases do not reflect a widespread competitive advantage, but rather highlight the disproportionate scrutiny placed on a tiny number of trans athletes, while million of cisgender athletes continue to win and thrive.

At the international level, the Olympics have allowed trans athletes to compete since 2004, yet there has been no dominance. In that time, we've had the much-publicized

appearance of New Zealand power lifter Laurel Hubbard, who failed to complete a single lift. The only gold medalist, Quinn, competed in soccer, a team sport. One thing that is clear from these results: being transgender is not a ticket to victory. Trans athletes win and lose just like anyone else and there is no “wave of transgender champions” taking over women’s sports. On the contrary, decades of inclusion have led to no measurable negative impact on competition.

Where there *is* measurable negative impact, however, is on the mental health of transgender youth in response to the continued attacks on their identity and wellbeing. Sports provide young people with opportunities to learn leadership, teamwork, self-esteem, discipline, and community belonging. These apply to ALL youth, including trans youth. LGBTQIA+ youth who participate in sports report lower rates of depression, one study finding a 20% reduction in depressive symptoms, compared to non LGBTQIA+ youth. Conversely, policies ostracizing children based on their identity leads to an increase in bullying, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Research shows that in states with trans-inclusive policies, trans students were 14% less likely to have considered suicide in the past year. A 2016 study from the NIH that trans students denied access to gender-appropriate bathrooms were 45% more likely to attempt suicide.

The facts show that trans athletes pose no threat to fairness or opportunities in girls’ or women’s sports. There is no evidence of any dominant competitive advantage. Fear of trans athletes “taking over” are not supported by reality as evidenced by the years of inclusive policies producing no evidence of competitive harm. The limited success of trans athletes at the highest levels of competition further demonstrates no inherent advantage exists. SB0588 would solve a problem that does not exist while simultaneously stripping a very small and vulnerable population of the chance to participate in sports and find belonging.

Maryland SB0588 runs counter to the core mission of scholastic athletics, which are built on inclusion, teamwork, and personal growth. Inclusion benefits trans kids by reducing depression and suicide risk, without disadvantaging anyone else.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the committee to find an unfavorable report on SB0588.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Chloe Kastner

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