



TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY KIM RUSSELL

Maryland House Ways and Means Committee

January 27, 2024

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I am Coach Kim Russell, Ambassador at Independent Women and advocate for women and girls. I am writing to you today to urge you to support House Bill 156. Women's sports have been my life and my passion. In college, I played two sports at the DI level, and I have been a women's lacrosse coach for 28 years. I have been inducted into three halls of fame for my contributions to the game of lacrosse and was appointed to the Women in Sports Commission for World Lacrosse (the governing body for the sport of lacrosse worldwide) in 2024.

Many of my players affectionately refer to me as the "Hippie Love Coach," not only because I'm a yoga instructor, am often barefoot, read energy, and coach intuitively, but because I've given countless individuals a safe space to thrive and feel a sense of belonging.

I've coached running down the sideline while nursing one child, with another in a backpack, while a third runs with me. I am a woman, through and through.

Never in a million years did I think I would be fighting to get back the rights that were given to women and girls almost 53 years ago.

When I accepted the job as Head Women's Lacrosse Coach & Wellness Instructor at Oberlin in August of 2018, I was so excited to be a part of an institution known for its academic rigor, open-minded dialogue, and freedom to express oneself. And then, I learned the truth. Oberlin—like many institutions of higher-ed these days—only supports free speech when your values align with theirs.

I learned this firsthand when I spoke out against males competing in women's sports. As my kids say, "Mama, you've been canceled twice." Canceled simply for saying what federal law requires: that women and men are entitled to equal athletic opportunities—opportunities that are not possible without single sex sport.

Without protections, opportunities to compete are taken away from women—to say nothing of trophies and awards. Because schools do not want to be accused of sex discrimination, many will choose to stay silent. No school should have to choose between doing what's right and protecting their reputation. House Bill 156 shields schools from unjust accusations while upholding fairness in sports.

I will never apologize for believing that women and girls should have the right to single sex competition. I'm hoping that my speaking up will give other coaches, administrators, faculty, parents, and athletes the courage to do the same.

At the very least, coaches and administrators must stop telling young women to stay silent and accept losing (or losing a spot) to a male. They must stop telling young women to accept having a fully intact male in their locker rooms.

Let's be honest about what is happening here: Young women are being groomed to accept discrimination, they are being groomed to compare their bodies to the bodies of hormonally impaired males, and they are being groomed to accept men in their private spaces.

You, Committee members, have the opportunity to be heroes. This is about upholding truth, preserving the dreams of female athletes, and protecting women's sports. I hope you will act to do so. Please vote yes for House Bill 156 and include protections for college sports to ensure fairness for all athletes.

Thank you.