

Dear Council Members,

My name is Anna Williams. I am a Junior in high school, I have loved and played soccer for 13 years, and I have been home schooled for my entire life. My soccer career started at the recreational level, same as most everyone else. Over the years, I have moved upwards from playing at the recreation level, to playing regionally across DMV through travel clubs, then to playing at the national level. For the past four years, I have been competing in a league called ECNL, which is a national league composed of only the top players in the nation. To put it in perspective, about ten million people in the US play youth soccer. Between the ages of twelve and nineteen, around twenty thousand girls of that number have the ability to play at the ECNL National Level. (According to World Class FC) That means I compete against the top one to two percent of players my age in the nation consistently. The second percentage I will mention is the success rate of ECNL players. Over seventy percent of ECNL girls players commit to division one schools, and over ninety percent of ECNL players commit to continue their soccer career in college at the division two and division three levels. (According to Wootton Common Sense) I joined ECNL my last year in middle school, and since then it has been beyond anything I have ever experienced on a field before. Everyone on the team is consistently well-talented, trainings are intense, and everyone loves to compete. It took me a few weeks to adjust to the high level and high demand set by my coaches, but in my first year in ECNL I kept up with my new teammates and excelled.

However, my freshman year in high school changed everything. I tried my best to maintain my skills while training alone over the summer and through the high school season in the fall, but there is only so much I can do by myself. I am the only home schooler on my team, so while my teammates were busy playing on actual teams in high school with full length games, I was struggling to maintain my skills. When we returned to club practices in the winter, I was extremely behind. My teammates had been playing full length soccer games, playing in real scenarios with real pressure. They were able to be adequately prepared for the club season and were able to transfer to the club level quickly. And I was not.

Since then, I have been practicing in the fall with the oldest middle school club team, the thirteen and fourteen year olds, just to try and recreate a semblance of what it would be like to return to my team in the spring. During my sophomore year, even after practicing with the thirteen year olds, I still showed up to my team in the spring slow and unprepared. I was so behind, even after working so hard not to be. I kept putting more and more pressure on myself to perform, even though I was set up to fail. I still got benched, and I still got in my head about every little mistake I made. This past fall of my junior year was especially hard. I am five foot nine inches tall, and I have been gaining muscle for the past three years. I am eight inches taller than the tallest girl on the middle school team, and weigh at least sixty more pounds than the heaviest. One of my first practices with the middle schoolers, I went into a tackle how I normally do, attempting to gain possession of the ball, and I ended up hurting the kid. Ever since that night I was scared to fully commit to tackles or be physical in any capacity on the field, because I was afraid I was going to hurt them.

Every year it is a battle and a struggle to adjust to the level my team plays at, and it affects not only my team, but my recruitment. The tournaments and college showcases that my team attends attracts hundreds of college scouts. I have always wanted to play soccer at the

collegiate level, so when I arrive at these tournaments early in the spring and am unprepared to perform at my full potential due to the rule that I can not play soccer in the fall, it negatively impacts not only me, but also my recruitment. I have worked so hard to get where I am, and to play at this high of a level in youth sports. Being granted the ability to play high school soccer would be beneficial not only to my further development as a player, but to my college recruitment. Ever since I started high school, it has been an uphill battle. I get benched, have to fight harder for playing time, and I have even more pressure on my shoulders, all because of how I am educated.

Being granted the opportunity to have the same experiences as my teammates by playing high school soccer will not only prepare me better for my club season and recruitment to the collegiate level, but help me play more of the game I love so much.

Thank you for your consideration,
Anna Williams
Howard County