

Statement by Debi Jackson
In Opposition to SB208
Kansas Senate Education Committee
February 23, 2021

I'm the mother of a 13-year-old transgender girl. I first want to ask you to take a moment to consider how it must feel for anyone in the trans community to see their bodies openly discussed by others and to once again have their basic rights debated in public forums. I guarantee that you would not want to have the fairness of your existence challenged or to have legislation pending that will make it more difficult to exist in your community. This is why these bills are so damaging and should be immediately killed before moving through the legislative process.

My daughter and kids like her are who are being targeted by these bills all across the country. Because she was affirmed at a young age and socially transitioned before puberty, she was able to start taking puberty blockers to prevent her body from developing with testosterone. That would have devastated her physically (requiring long, painful, expensive surgeries later to correct) and mentally. SIDE NOTE: this is why the the bills that want to ban this life-saving, evidence-based, best practice care for transgender adolescents and teens should also be immediately stopped.

For young people like my daughter, there is zero physical advantage in sports. For those who haven't been able to access blockers at the onset of puberty and did start to develop with testosterone, beginning blockers and estrogen even in the later teen years will negate any supposed advantage — even what people like to refer to as "legacy advantages". If you have dense bone structure but lose muscle mass and your ability to process high volumes of oxygen, it's going to be harder to move that heavy body around, isn't? So not really much of an advantage simply because you are bigger.

Cis people (those whose sex at birth and gender identity are aligned) — male and female — come in all shapes and sizes, develop at different rates during pubertal years, and have varying degrees of athleticism. But we don't seem to care if a 100 pound boy has to face a 200 pound boy of the same age in a sport. And we allow girls to participate in boys' sports like football or wrestling, so we can eliminate the argument that a cis girl's physical safety is at risk if her opponent is a transgender girl.

But we should also remember that participating in sports it isn't always about winning. Sports help with mental health, teaches teamwork, provides camaraderie with others, teaches discipline and goal-setting. It opens doors to friendship, connection, and community with others. And trans kids deserve to experience all of those benefits, too.

These are all life skills that can help a student during their educational years but also set them up for success as adults. Millions of students participate in sports every year and don't take home a trophy or secure a scholarship. But they all still win, because they leave the field or leave the court having learned about themselves and having a shared experience with their peers.

For a trans kid who has had mental health struggles just to figure out who they are, might have been bullied or have had a hard time fitting in, denying them the chance to have those positive experiences and enjoy the mental health benefits that go along with them is just cruel. It's especially disheartening that some of the people who support these bills also demanded that kids have access to sports during the COVID-19 pandemic as a mental health benefit, but are willing to deny that opportunity to a child because they happen to be transgender. Forcing someone a young athlete to choose between living authentically or playing a sport would be a new cruel form of conversion therapy and would benefit no one.

It should also be noted that a recently published study found that overall participation in girls' sports declines in states with trans-restrictive sports policies. Think about it...a cisgender girl that is too tall, too muscular, or even just too good can be questioned about her gender along with the few (if any) trans girls participating. These restrictive policies are sexist because they are based in the notion that some girls are too good at their sport. They are often also centered in racism, because it's usually Black trans girls who end up targeted by lawsuits and complaints that they are "stealing" something from white girls. We have a sad history (current practice, really) of policing Black feminine bodies. This is an extension of that practice.

If Kansas legislators really want to protect girls' and women's sports, they would pursue passing legislation that models the inclusive policies from one of the 16 states that have integrated trans girls into sports for years with no problems. AND they would actually invest money and resources into those athletic programs.

Here are some helpful links and studies:

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/reports/2021/02/08/495502/fair-play/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5357259/>

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1e6a/bd2c1e03ba88e9ac8da94ea1d69ff3f4878a.pdf>

<https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/39/10/695>

<https://www.sportsci.org/2016/WCPASabstracts/ID-1699.pdf>

https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/articles_and_report/chasing-equity-the-triumphs-challenges-and-opportunities-in-sports-for-girls-and-women/

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