



children's
defense fund
ohio

Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee

HB 151 - Opponent Testimony

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Good afternoon, Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee of the Ohio Senate, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to HB 151.

My name is Alison Paxson, and I am a Senior Policy Associate for the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. With more than four decades of advocacy on behalf of Ohio's children, it is the mission of the Children's Defense Fund to champion policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse and neglect, and ensure their access to health care, quality education, and nutritional wellness.

As an organization, we firmly believe that all children deserve to enjoy being children, and we work to defend and protect the joy of growing up for all children and youth, especially those most marginalized. **That is why we are urging this committee to remove extremely harmful language to enact the Save Women's Sports Act inserted into HB 151 or reject this bill in its entirety.**

The Ohio High School Athletic Association already has a policy in place regarding trans youth in sports in Ohio. Given this and the fact that only 9 trans Ohio students in 5 years have been impacted by this policy, these provisions are as inherently harmful as they are unnecessary.

There are few experiences that so unequivocally epitomize childhood more than the act of play, and participation in team sports is a very common way that children play and build key social, emotional, and cognitive competencies as well as community and a sense of belonging among

peers. In many ways, these experiences can help fortify and bolster a child's mental health, which could not be more important than in today's context as Ohio has seen severe increases in mental health challenges among our youth. We know that, in 2020, nearly [one in eight](#) Ohio children received a diagnosis of anxiety, depression or both, a figure up 42% from 2016 – the 10th-highest increase nationwide. This legislation as is would pose even further harm to child mental well-being for a student population that has one of the most disparately high rates of anxiety, depression, suicide ideation, and other challenges.

Of further harm, HB 151's language barring trans athletes from playing on sports teams matching their gender identities represents extreme government overreach and a total invasion of privacy. While recent amendments thankfully will no longer require student athletes to undergo genital examinations when their sex is in question, this bill would still allow anyone, for any reason, to dispute a minor's sex, forcing them to provide their original birth certificate to establish it. This opens up all youth to be targeted and exposed to a barrage of hateful, biased allegations, regardless of if they are trans or not.

In today's climate, there are few student populations so battered by harmful legislation that undermines their joy of being children and growing up than trans youth. But Ohio does not have to follow suit to a host of other states considering such policies - [many of whose lawmakers cannot cite even a single example of how trans youth participating in sports has caused an issue in their own state or region](#).

HB 151 previously had bipartisan support before the harmful, anti-trans youth in sports provisions were rolled into it. Given that these provisions have no common threads connecting them even remotely to teacher mentorship - the original focus of Rep. Jones' bill - then these provisions have no sensible place in this legislation. We urge you to remove them and to ensure they do not progress in further hearings by this committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.