

April 23, 2025

House Committee on Education

HouseEducation@rilegislature.gov

Re: Opposition for H5842

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony of my opposition to H 5842. I am an adolescent medicine physician, pediatrician, and resident of Rhode Island.

The “Fairness in Women’s Sports Act” would inflict harm on all students in Rhode Island. Not only will it inflict direct harm on students who are directly prohibited from playing sports, but studies have shown that sports participation decreases in all girls and all transgender students when there are gender limitations to participation.

Engagement in sports has numerous benefits for students. As the National Federation of State High School Associations elaborates, high school sports allow students to develop “a stronger sense of self-confidence in building relationships with others and having an expanded capacity for empathy,” “a better understanding of self and in so doing understanding how their actions affect others,” and “foundations for lifelong fitness habits.” (Amaro, 2020) For transgender students especially, participation in high school sports reaps significant benefits. According to one transgender student surveyed, playing sports “help[s] me cope with gender dysphoria and depression.” (Trevor Project, 2021).

This bill represents a sweeping exclusion of transgender girls from school sports that would deny them the critical benefits of participating in sports programs. School sports provide a unique opportunity for students to learn self-esteem, sportsmanship, leadership, and self-discipline that fosters healthy adolescent development. Depriving transgender girls of the benefit of school sports—a benefit they currently have in Rhode Island—takes away an important educational opportunity that is routinely provided to other students. Over the past few years, 25 states have in short order passed bans on transgender youth inclusion in sports (Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, Missouri, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming). These bans seek solutions to problems that do not exist and are part of a sad effort in some states to target transgender youth for political gain. Rhode Island, including its schools, have for years established inclusive participation policies that ensure a level playing field. H5842 undermines those efforts.

In addition, by singling out one group of girls to be deprived of the chance to participate on school teams and in athletic programs, H 5842 seeks to mark transgender girls as a

disfavored class and threatens to create a school climate of discrimination and bias. The bill creates a transgender-status-based classification that unfairly stigmatizes transgender girls by excluding them from an integral part of school programming and of the school community. While this bill will have an especially negative impact on transgender girls, it also inflicts harm on all girls by perpetuating unfounded stereotypes that have long fueled sex discrimination in sports. When we tell transgender girls that they can't play girls' sports, it sends the harmful message that they don't belong and that they must choose between being themselves and participating in activity alongside their peers. Rhode Island has a long history of ensuring equality for our transgender community members, and we trust that Rhode Island will continue that work by not passing this discriminatory measure.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Maayan Leroy-Melamed, MD, MPH

Adolescent Medicine Physician