

To: RI House Education Committee  
Date: April 21, 2025  
Subject: Reject H5842

I am writing to express my strong opposition to H5842, which would ban transgender women and girls and non-binary athletes from participating on sports teams that align with their gender identity. This would sanction discrimination against trans youth and put schools in a bind, given guidance by RI Attorney General Peter F. Neronha and Commissioner of Education Angélica Infante-Green who have made it clear that schools must continue to uphold policies that protect LGBTQIA+ students.<sup>1</sup> I am a pediatric psychologist with a focus on supporting mental health in LGBTQIA+ youth. As a professional committed to the advancement and application of psychological science, I am deeply concerned about misinformation that mischaracterizes the “problems” of trans women and girls on youth sports teams and about the impact of policies that restrict LGBTQIA+ youth’s equal access to educational and recreational opportunities.

Research<sup>2</sup> suggests that concern about allowing transgender athletes to compete in accordance with their gender identity is misplaced. While it is true that trans athletes may have some morphological or physiological differences compared with their teammates, only ~0.5% of the population identifies as trans. Based on the normal distribution, about 2.3% of cis-athletes are expected to fall outside of the norm with respect to physiological or morphological differences (for example, being uniquely tall, muscular). Unless the committee also believes that any individual who falls more than 2 standard deviations away from the norm with respect to morphology and physiology should be excluded from playing a sport, this bill would unfairly target trans individuals while restricting their rights to free expression.

Participation in sports is linked with numerous benefits, particularly for children and adolescents. It has been correlated with higher levels of self-esteem, lower levels of depression, and greater school belonging among LGBTQIA+ youth.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, one study found that transgender and nonbinary students who participated in sports reported higher grades compared to those who did not participate.<sup>4</sup> Another study found that transgender students who participated in collegiate sports may be less likely to report psychological distress, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, and suicidal behavior compared to transgender students who did not participate in sports.<sup>5</sup> If transgender girls and women are not allowed to participate in sports based on their gender identity, they could be denied these and other benefits. Exclusion from sports could also result in discrimination or harassment for transgender students. A recent study using YRBSS data found that transgender high school students report disproportionate bullying, persistent hopelessness, and suicidal ideation compared to cisgender students.<sup>6</sup> Evidence suggests that transgender students in higher education may also experience greater levels of harassment and discrimination, have a more negative perception of campus and classroom climates, and feel less accepted as part of the campus community compared to cisgender students.<sup>7</sup> Any of these disparities could be made worse if transgender students are denied participation in school sports or forced to participate consistent with their sex assigned at birth under a state ban.

Policies such as H5842 fuel stigma and misinformation, placing transgender individuals—particularly youth—at greater risk of harm. Rhode Island should be a place where all individuals, regardless of gender identity, have equal access to educational and recreational opportunities. I

urge you to reject H5842 to safeguard the rights, dignity, and well-being of transgender, gender-diverse, and nonbinary individuals in our state.

Sincerely,  
Wendy Plante, PhD

1. <https://ride.ri.gov/press-releases/attorney-general-neronha-and-commissioner-infante-green-issue-guidance-schools-lgbtq-students-rights-and-diversity-programs>
2. Oberlin DJ. Sex differences and athletic performance. Where do trans individuals fit into sports and athletics based on current research? *Front Sports Act Living*. 2023 Oct 27;5:1224476. doi: 10.3389/fspor.2023.1224476. PMID: 37964771; PMCID: PMC10641525.
3. Rochelle M. Eime et al., A Systematic Review of the Psychological and Social Benefits of Participation in Sport for Children and Adolescents: Informing Development of a Conceptual Model of Health Through Sport, *10 Int. J. Behav. Nutrition & Phys. Activity* 1 (2013).
4. Matt D. Hoffman et al., Associations Between Organized Sport Participation and Mental Health Difficulties: Data from Over 11,000 US Children and Adolescents, *17 PLoS One* 1 (2022).
5. Caitlin M. Clark & Joseph G. Kosciw, Engaged or Excluded: LGBTQ Youth's Participation in School Sports and Their Relationship to Psychological Well-being, *59 Psychol. Schs.* 95 (2022). 74 The Trevor Project, The Trevor Project Research Brief: The Well-Being of LGBTQ Youth Athletes (2020 ), <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/LGBTQ-Youth-Sports-and-Well-Being-Research-Brief.pdf>.
6. Shoshana K. Goldberg, Fair Play: The Importance of Sports Participation for Transgender Youth, *Ctr. For Am. Prog.* (2021), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/fair-play/> (An analysis of data collected through the National College Health Assessment survey, a national survey of college students conducted by the American College Health Association).
7. Nicolas A. Suarez, et al., Disparities in School Connectedness, Unstable Housing, Experiences of Violence, Mental Health, and Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors Among Transgender and Cisgender High School Students — Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2023, *73 MMWR Suppl.* 58 (2024).
8. Abbie E. Goldberg, Williams Inst., *Transgender Students in Higher Education* 6 (2018), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Trans-Higher-Ed-Aug-2018.pdf>; See also Kerith J. Conron et al., Williams Inst., *Educational Experiences of Transgender People* 17 (2022), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Trans-Higher-Ed-Apr-2022.pdf>.