



Letters for the Congressional Record
House Oversight Committee
Subcommittee on Health Care and Financial Services

December 5, 2023

Rebekah Bruesehoff, she/her/hers

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Rebekah Bruesehoff. I am a 16-year-old high school junior who actually loves school. I'm a straight A honors student who is beginning to look at colleges. I sing in three acapella groups. I'm a pastor's kid and a big sister to two brothers, who can be really annoying and I still love them. I also happen to be transgender. I've been living as my authentic self for eight years—that's over half my life.

I started playing field hockey when I was 10 years old, and I fell in love. It's fun, full of speed and excitement and getting to hit a ball with a stick! Who doesn't love that? But seriously, it is one of the hardest and most rewarding things I do. Academics and the performing arts come easily to me, but field hockey challenges me. I have to work really hard to succeed. It's taught me how to fall down and get back up. I've never been the best on the team, but I'm committed to working with my teammates towards a common goal. We win together, and we lose together.

Field hockey gives me so much: confidence, strength, and a place to belong. For me, it's not just my sport, it's my community. Through field hockey I've learned how hard work and perseverance can help you make a real-time difference. That translates to everything I do in life. I've had incredible coaches and wonderful teammates. There's never been a question of whether I belonged. Whether it's on the field or off the field, we take care of each other.

I've been speaking out about the rights of kids like me to play sports for years now. I've watched as my friends in other states across the country had their right to play debated and legislated. I live in New Jersey where I thought I was safe, where everyone said I was safe. Now I am talking to members of Congress. It is difficult to believe that a kid like me playing field hockey is among the most important issues Congress has to address. I don't understand why lawmakers insist on bullying kids who just want to play. It seems absurd that a sixteen-year-old should have to tell lawmakers that kids should be able to play sports with their friends, but that's where we are as this debate has spread from state houses to Congress.

Sports are one of the most American experiences in any childhood. Not allowing me to play sports with my peers would alienate me from my community and prevent me from continuing to become a better and better version of myself. It would limit access to essential life skills that we want all kids to have like grit, determination, learning to work with others towards a common goal.

I have been raised and taught by my parents, coaches, and teachers to be the kind of person who actively works to include people, makes sure no one eats alone in the lunchroom, and who stands up to bullies. Protecting all children's access to being known for who they are and having full access to participating in all facets of school life is a part of that. Trans kids are a part of every community all across the country. We aren't going anywhere. We all deserve a chance to be kids and play.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebekah Bruesehoff
New Jersey

Peri Hennigar, they/them/he

As an athlete, I have always known I was a little different than my teammates and competitors. About half-way through high school, I fully came to terms with the fact that I didn't feel truly comfortable presenting as a woman. That realization brought with it so much inner peace and joy, until I realized all of the controversy around trans and gender non-conforming athletes. I told myself in those moments "just wait 'til you graduate college."

Flash forward a couple years, I spent every day terrified my team would learn how I felt and I would be forced to give up one of the greatest things in my life. Something I had spent over 15 years of my life dedicated to and had used as an outlet was now something that brought me so much worry. I had panic attacks over the social media posts I made and even just by showing up to practice in case a teammate recognized something I posted or said that would show them I am a part of the non-binary community. And I found myself living each day with frustration that I felt as though I could not explore this aspect of myself and express myself how I wanted to.

After struggling with these thoughts for 2 and a half years, as well as some other reasons, I ended up leaving the athletics program and allowing myself to choose my own path. While I miss the love and joy I got from athletics, getting to take part in sports in my own unique way has been more freeing. Especially since I have been able to do this as an individual using they/he pronouns. If anything, leaving the official sports program has especially revealed to me how important it is to do sports in the ways a person is most comfortable.

No athlete or person should have to live their life in fear over something they cannot control and be forced to keep themselves hidden from those that are supposed to know and care about their whole self. If this is how I, a 21-year-old college student with access to a couple resources, feels, imagine how young elementary, middle school, and high schoolers feel as they are made to sit on the metaphorical sideline and watch their rights get debated and taken away from them over something like this.

Athletics have always been a place students can turn to for a sense of purpose, belonging, community, accomplishment, and so much more. The people I've met in sports are still some of my closest friends. My experiences in sports have also helped shape me into the person I am today. They gave me a sense of determination, discipline, and passion that I try to put forth into every aspect of my life. It's needless to say without sports, I would be nowhere near the person I am today. Especially as someone now living in Wyoming, sports are a major part of life for so many people, we must fight for everyone to get the chance to take part in these experiences.

Not only that, but there isn't an actual issue for the nation regarding trans athletes. Two years ago, during February in Wyoming the Wyoming Senate proposed a bill banning trans women from competing in sports at any level. During the lobbying and discussion process the writer of the bill made it clear how no one in Wyoming had felt the need for the bill or asked the senator for it. Instead, the senator was responding to actions taking place in other states. Think about how many other states may be in the exact same boat. Additionally, one of the arguably most red states in the nation didn't see a need for a bill like this and killed it. That should speak for itself. Trans athletes should be allowed to play and have those rights protected.

To willingly and purposely bar so many individuals from getting equal access to these sports is both unamerican and inhumane. Sports are supposed to be a place people go to make life-long friends and

find their support systems. It's a place where important socialization can take place, and an opportunity for people to grow and one day represent the nation for their sports. Legislation that doesn't protect trans and gender non-conforming individuals takes away these opportunities from so many people at times when it's crucial for them to form these connections. Our nation has a constitutional duty to protect and serve all its citizens, and extending Title IX in favor of protecting trans athletes will do just that.

This statement was originally prepared for delivery to Suzanne Goldberg, the Deputy Assistant Secretary with the U.S. Department of Education on November 10, 2022, and repurposed with the author's consent.

Mack Beggs, he/him/his

My entire life I knew that I was different. I could see it in my classmates faces and how the adults treated me at times. Although, it was always the individuals that didn't care to know me that had a problem with me. From a very young age I realized that it didn't matter where you came from, who you were, your race, or gender. Anything is possible; nothing is impossible. Anything is achievable if you dedicate yourself to it one hundred percent. Honestly, I don't know how or why I felt the way I did, but I knew I felt like a male.

In grade school my catches were impeccable when it came to football, so I asked to play on the boy's football team at Eules Jr. High. I was excited, but nervous, to ask the coach, but I felt better about it when some of the players on the team vouched for me. Coach ultimately said no; two years in a row. Growing up playing sports like softball and dance, I was hurt and shocked that I was denied the right to play because the coach saw me as female. I was outstanding on every other team I was a part of, and I made sure that I dedicated myself any way that I could to be the best.

I have never seen on a binary system, which is weird because being engaged in sports has geared me in directions throughout my life to see gender differences. I remember just trying to participate in games that were exciting and didn't make me feel like an outcast. My teachers pushed me in the classroom, making sure I was paying attention or that I was on task. Every time I felt myself pulling away, sports brought me back.

One thing that sports has taught me, or in my case wrestling, is that it doesn't matter how you play if you don't practice. You can't go all into something with no prior knowledge thinking you're going to score a point or get a takedown on the next play. I, of course, never took it seriously. I was dedicated and motivated, but my mentality was really relaxed. Trusting in my skills and the time I devoted on or off the mat when it came down to competition was most important to me. My coach at Trinity High School, Travis Clark, was a cis, white, brute of a man from a small town in Ohio. He was from a military background and was six foot and over 250 pounds. Although he may not have understood what I was going through at the time, he taught me to make sure to have a great time and if I wanted to be a champion, I had to follow a fighter's lifestyle. All your training and everything that you have ever learned comes down to one moment.

I am currently doing Jiu-Jitsu, taking a break from college to focus on work, and I am just a few years into my story. I have so much left to write.

Sports has given me the necessary tools to be my most authentic self and live my life without fear. I eat, breathe, and work just as hard as my cis peers on and off the mat and I realize that now many others recognize that being trans is normal. At the end of the day, we are all human.

I would like to remind all the adults in legislation across the United States that they are attacking children and preventing them from having the same rights as their peers. It hurts hearing stories from kids reaching out to me trying to figure out what to do because they feel threatened or unsafe being themselves. I think everyone can agree growing up is scary, and to not have support on how you feel would make anyone feel alone.

From the film *Changing the Game*, a statistic shown says that “40% of transgender individuals have attempted suicide.” That’s 40% of children, friends, and family that these bills today have impacted deep enough to the point of endangerment. I am afraid the statistic could only be growing due to the push back of many of the states enacting these anti-trans bills; including yourselves if you continue to pass this bill(s). This isn’t new. Think back to the outbreak of backlash from the bathroom bill talk back in 2016 and 2017. We can only conclude that that push backs will worsen and has continued downhill with not just attacks on the LGBTQ community, but other minorities.

From my story alone I am growing into a very strong human being and would say if I didn’t have sports, I don’t think I would be here today. I know I am only one voice, but I have an amazing support system right behind me. I am just like you, and you are just like me whether you would like to believe it or not. Let’s be on the side of history that is continuously changing and allow these kids to be their most authentic selves. Giving them the proper accessibility and same rights as all other cis human beings in the United States is just a start. We all deserve to figure out who we are. Being in high school is already hard enough, so why do we have dim the lights to the kids that are just trying to find their way back to themselves through this crazy world we have created? The world is changing, and society needs to evolve with it. I have kids, parents, and teachers that ask me from all over the world what am I going to do about it. Well, I am here. My work is long and continuous, and I need help. What will YOU do about it?

Sincerely,
Mack Beggs

This statement was originally prepared for delivery to Suzanne Goldberg, the Deputy Assistant Secretary with the U.S. Department of Education on November 10, 2022, and repurposed with the author’s consent.

Sivon, he/him/his

From a young age, my world revolved around sports. Whether I was on the soccer field, the baseball diamond, the basketball court, even the empty parking lot across the street from my elementary school where I played football every day during recess—that’s where I was most happy, most comfortable, most me.

As I entered the latter years of elementary school and made my way toward adolescence, I continued to thrive in the world of athletics, and began focusing on one sport: soccer. At the same time, I began to

feel a disconnect between the gender everyone knew me as—a girl—and the gender I felt on the inside—closer to a boy. As time went on, I realized my truth. I was, had always been, and would always be, a boy.

In seventh grade, I transitioned. At that point, I was playing on a developmental academy girls soccer team, a level that required a considerable amount of dedication to the sport. Now that I had transitioned and was living as my true self, I knew I belonged on the boys' soccer team, and desperately wanted to make the switch. But at the same time, I was terrified that others wouldn't see it the same way and that I would lose something so important to me. But because there are no bills in my state prohibiting transgender youth from playing on the team that aligns with their gender identity, I was able to make the switch and continue doing what I loved.

In the past five years since I transitioned, I have continued to play soccer in a combination of school teams and outside of school training. Soccer is such an important part of my life. When I play soccer, I feel alive. I want to run so fast, push myself so hard, train so many hours, even when I feel like I can't kick another ball — because in that incredible exhaustion is the most extraordinary connection to success. When I play soccer, I experience the beautiful feeling of belonging. When I play, I feel inspired to become the best I can be. I feel complete. I play for the same reasons so many other youth play, transgender or not.

Recent research shows that more and more trans youth are living as their authentic selves. Other research shows that a large percentage of youth play sports. However, because of the attacks on trans youth in sports, there are many states where trans youth are prohibited from playing sports on the team on which they belong. Without the Biden Administration adding regulations to Title IX regarding access to gender-specific sports teams for transgender youth, not all trans youth athletes across the country are protected. And, as the research and our stories show, we are not going anywhere. Nobody, transgender youth included, should be denied the right to play sports on the team that matches their identity, to experience what I have been so lucky to experience. Transgender youth just want to play sports, like everyone else, and Title IX can ensure that we are able to. Thank you.

This statement was originally prepared for delivery to Suzanne Goldberg, the Deputy Assistant Secretary with the U.S. Department of Education on November 10, 2022, and repurposed with the author's consent.