

Lisa Cataldi

From: Amber Ward <amber.s.ward@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 9, 2024 8:22 AM
To: House Education Committee
Subject: NO to H7727 and H7781

Honorable Members of the House Education Committee,

I am a resident of Bristol and work in Newport on the Naval Station. For nearly 6 years, I have served as a senior attorney for a Department of Defense institute that promotes the rule of law and compliance with international human rights standards. I am also a senior reserve military officer with nearly 19 years of honorable service, including more than six years of active duty service at military installations within Rhode Island. Directly relevant to these bills, I am a parent of two school-aged children and a former collegiate athlete and two-year captain of a decorated women's track and field team. While my military assignments first brought my family to Rhode Island in 2014, our deep appreciation for the culture and sense of community, the quality of life, and the natural beauty of this State moved us to establish permanent roots here. My family is deeply proud of our home State's legacy as a leader in recognizing the humanity and equality of LGBTQ+ people for decades.

Today, I am compelled to write to you to express my grave concern over and full rejection of H 7727, Fairness in Women's Sports, and H 7781, Parents Bill of Rights Act. Although I understand the House Rules allow any Representative to demand a committee hearing on any piece of legislation they propose, I urge the Committee to take swift and decisive action to not permit any consideration of these harmful and disingenuously-named bills to progress beyond this committee. I further urge you to send a strong and clear signal to the sponsors that the voters of Rhode Island will not tolerate the introduction of dangerous anti-transgender legislation disguised in title-only as being 'fair' and 'rights'-based; both bills seek to deny basic rights to transgender, gender-divers and transitioning youth.

As the proud parent of a bright and beautiful transgender teen and an ally to all transgender persons, I appeal to your humanity and remind you of your duty to uphold the Constitution of Rhode Island, Section 2 of which provides, in part, "All free governments are instituted for the protection, safety, and happiness of the people.....No person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law, nor shall any person be denied **equal protection of the laws. No** otherwise qualified **person shall, solely by reason of** race, **gender** or handicap **be subject to discrimination by the state**, its agents or any person or entity doing business with the state." (emphasis added). Both H 7727 and H 7781 seek to limit the rights of LGBTQ+ identifying people, thereby depriving them of equal protection of the law, with a specific animosity directed at highly vulnerable transgender, gender diverse, and transitioning youth, solely on the basis of their gender.

H 7727 targets transgender students for exclusion, prohibiting them from playing on the school sports teams with their friends and potentially subjecting any female student athletes to invasive medical exams. I found it deeply disappointing that the sponsors of this bill, who are sponsoring at least two other harmful anti-transgender bills as part of an ugly, broader campaign, cited a grossly-outdated source in support of their dangerous political agenda. More recent research and peer reviewed publications document that the "gender gap in sport [is] closing," and is "[influenced by reduced opportunity and sociopolitical factors that influence full female participation across a range of sports around the world.](#)" [The Gender Gap in Sport Performance: Equity Influences Equality.](#) "Studies on women and their inclusion as research participants, particularly those published in the exercise and sports science journals, have been vastly inadequate....Both past and present research studies of athletic performance, acute exercise, and exercise training involve more men than women, or a lack of distinction between the sexes." [The Biological Basis of Sex Differences in Athletic Performance: Consensus Statement for the American College of Sports Medicine, Translational Journal of the ACSM 8\(4\):p 1-33, Fall 2023.](#) Given the nature of more recent, readily-accessible findings, I submit that it was irresponsible and misleading of the sponsors to cite such a weak and outdated source.

H 7781 threatens schools and teachers with penalties for not complying with vague requirements to allow virtually any individual parent to dictate school lesson plans, remove teachers' and school staffs' ability to support LGBTQ+ students in school, and mandate the forced outing of LGBTQ youth without regard to students' safety. Disingenuously-named "parents' rights" bills aim to pit parents, schools, and students against each other and exclude transgender youth from full and fair participation in school and society. Moreover, they instigate fear among families, educators and healthcare providers. I am confident the support certain educators provided to my transgender child over the last two years was lifesaving.

Ensuring a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment is crucial for the well-being and educational success of all youth. It is well and credibly documented that unsafe, exclusionary, and unsupportive environments created by anti-LGBTQ laws and policies adversely impact the mental health of youth. A [2023 survey](#) conducted by the [Trevor Project](#) found "an overwhelming majority of LGBTQ youth have been negatively impacted by recent debates and laws around anti-LGBTQ policies and that many have also experienced victimization as a result." Specifically, that survey found that 71% of LGBTQ youth - including 86% of transgender and nonbinary youth - stated that state laws restricting the rights of LGBTQ+ youth have negatively impacted their mental health. I have seen first hand the dangerous, life-threatening impact such laws and media coverage thereof can have on transgender youth who are acutely aware of the sweeping campaign of attacks targeting transgender people across our great Nation. Transgender, gender diverse, and transitioning youth deserve to feel safe, secure and welcome in this State, and to have a life expectancy and quality that is not threatened by the perpetuation of this fear-generating anti-trans campaign. Rhode Island has the opportunity and responsibility to lead once again by saying NO to dangerous and disingenuous legislation that attacks our children and the LGTBQ community.

I oppose both pieces of legislation, and urge this Committee and the Rhode Island Legislature to lead once again and say NO to HR7727 and H 7781.

I thank you for your time and your service to the people of Rhode Island, especially your most vulnerable constituents.

Respectfully,

Amber Ward
Bristol, RI