

Memo To: House Education Committee
From: Kelly Nevins, CEO, Women's Fund of Rhode Island
Date: April 3, 2024
Regards: Opposition to H7727

Women's Fund of Rhode Island (WFRI) invests in women and girls through research, advocacy, grantmaking, and strategic partnerships designed to achieve gender equity through systemic change. The work of WFRI often happens at the intersection of other inequities that marginalized communities face, including from the transgender community. We join with other equity advocates in ***strong opposition to H7727***, which would ban transgender athletes in high school and college sports from playing on teams that do not match their reproductive anatomy.

We are strong advocates for enforcing Title IX protections in Rhode Island. Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 is a federal law that states, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." Title IX protections have since been expanded by the Department of Education to include "discrimination based on gender identity or failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity."

Sports are an important way for children to build confidence and friendship while maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Sports teaches cooperation and compromise through teamwork and it can also teach empathy in learning how to manage things that don't go someone's way. Student-athletes also learn leadership, responsibility, and discipline.

This bill puts transgender youth at even further risk of isolation, mental health issues, as well as physical health issues by not allowing them to participate according to their gender identity. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people, with [LGBTQ youth being four times more likely to attempt suicide](#). For the very small number of transgender kids who are looking to find a sense of connection and community, sports offer a lifeline.

Transgender children vary in athletic ability, just as other youth do. There is no evidence to support claims that allowing transgender students to play on a team that fits their gender identity would affect the fairness of the sport or competition (ACLU, 2020). [The Rhode Island Interscholastic League already has policies](#) that both protect transgender youth and ensure a level playing field for all athletes, which have been successfully used by our schools for years.

Requiring transgender youth to athletically compete on teams based on their sex/gender assigned at birth is the same as banning them from sports entirely. ALL youth should have access to the benefits of sports. We urge our legislators to join us in opposing this bill.