

Hannah Lohr
Testimony in Opposition to SB208
Kansas Senate Education Committee
Hearing -February 23, 2021, 1:30pm

Dear Kansas Legislator,

Ever since I was 5 years old and my parents took me to my first soccer practice, sports have been an integral part of my life. As I transitioned from middle school into high school, my sporting passions shifted toward running. Even as a young person, I worked day after day to improve my times. By the end of my high school career, I was a top state runner with a full tuition scholarship to college. Into college, though I was not on national caliber, I continued to perform well within conference and regional realms. While I experienced great performance success, my wins and my losses were hardly the greatest effect of sports on my life. Sports taught me and they continue to teach other young people about teamwork, structure, perseverance, and even loss—each valuable lessons for the larger nexus of life. Though this letter is not about me nor my successes, I state them because I realize my successes so strongly relied upon support not only from my parents, coaches, and teammates, but also institutional systems that benefited my pursuits.

American sports have a deep history of privileging certain groups over others. Those segregated parts still paint an ugly stain on sports—a stain Kansas should wish not to contribute to. At the onset of the 1940s, racial discrimination still dominated any sport ranging from recreational to professional sports. The first woman to run in the Boston marathon did not do so until 1966—and she still was pushed off by men unhappy to see her engaging in sport. But each of these groups of people, still facing discrimination in many ways today, persisted in their fights for equality in sports. They did this not only because they knew they deserved the right to compete alongside the privileged parts of society, but also because they knew the importance of inclusion for all in sports.

We now come to a point in history, and specifically Kansas history, in which we are faced with a choice to discriminate or to include. Kansas' call to ban trans athletes from high school sports would have significant repercussions not only for individual athletes, but for communities as a whole. Annette Lareau, researcher of socioeconomic differences in the United States, documents the importance of children's engagement in sports. She found that when children are offered the opportunity to engage in structured activities, such as sports, children are much more likely to end up in higher socioeconomic class simply because of the life skills they gain. Banning trans individuals from sports, especially in formative years, automatically inhibits them from fair life chances.

Not only would exclusion of trans female athletes inhibit their life chances, it would also diminish their sense of wellbeing. According to the human rights campaign, 41 percent of trans boys and 34 percent of trans girls do not feel safe in the locker room. The institutions that exclude, and specifically this Kansas legislation, would have blood on their hands if such a law is passed. Trans adolescents have a high rate of attempted suicide at 29.9 percent. Suicide rates among trans is nearly 10 times the national rate. This should raise tremendous alarm to the

lawmakers so vehemently trying to exclude them from adolescent activities. Their argument often resides on trans identity being a choice, rather than a natural way of being. While I do not believe such arguments should even matter, I point to the fact that if it were a choice, why would an adolescent choose to live in such anguish in a society that doesn't accept them? What child would want to be brought to point of suicide? What parent would want to contribute to that? What lawmaker would want to contribute to that?

As a former athlete, I understand the argument for exclusion of trans in sports, and it certainly has no basis. People argue for trans exclusion because as soon as trans individuals start beating cis individuals, they view this as unfair. We have been socially taught to believe that sports are about winning. However, fairness has brought large contention to even the professional sports arena. Even Caster Semenya, a cis-female who has always identified as female, has faced tremendous scrutiny for her naturally high testosterone levels. It would seem that anyone viewed to be "abnormal" by certain exclusionary sects of society would always be deemed "abnormal" no matter the basis—biological or social. Not even biological bases are enough for the privileged groups of people who determine who is and who is not included in sports.

Thus, we must ask ourselves, why does our society even have sports? Is it to teach our children to win, no matter the cost? Even at the expense of others? Even at the literal death of young people? Is it to teach children that if you're a certain way that society deems as appropriate, you can succeed, but if you don't fit that category biologically or socially, you have not space to grow? Or is it to teach them teamwork among all walks of life? Is it to teach dedication and perseverance? Is it to teach inclusivity so that we might work toward a more just and peaceful society rather than one undergirded by competition and strife? Is it to teach them that all children in America might have a dream that they can work toward achieving, not matter their identity?

Kansas will be on the wrong side of history should this legislation pass. I urge you to consider what such repercussions would have. I urge you to reconsider, mostly for the sake of trans adolescents and adults, but also for the sake of reaching a greater realm of equity for all of society.

Sincerely,

Hannah Lohr
(Previously Hannah DeVries)
High school Athlete: North Kansas City High School
College Athlete: Pittsburg State University