



For Young LGBTQ Lives

Testimony: Iowa HF 2309, February 9, 2022

Members of the House Committee on Education, The Trevor Project would like to thank you for the opportunity to express our strong opposition to HF 2309, a harmful bill which would effectively ban transgender youth from participating in school sports, denying them the health benefits and valuable life lessons of being part of a team and threatening their mental health.

The Trevor Project is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people. We work to save young lives by providing free and confidential crisis services via a 24/7 phone lifeline, chat, and text. We also operate TrevorSpace, the largest safe space social networking site for LGBTQ youth, as well as innovative education, research, and advocacy programs.

At The Trevor Project, we hear every day from transgender youth in crisis who want nothing more than to be recognized for who they are. Based on our research and the stories our crisis services team hears firsthand, we know that respecting and affirming a young person's identity is essential to their mental health and well-being. The Trevor Project's telephone lifeline and chat and messaging crisis services are routinely contacted by transgender youth expressing the positive impact of sports participation, as well as the heartbreaking effects of exclusion.

Denying transgender youth the ability to participate in sports increases the kind of social isolation and stigma that contributes to self-harm and suicide risk. Conversely, our research has shown that participating in sports has positive effects, as LGBTQ young athletes reported nearly 20% lower rates of depressive symptoms compared to non-athletes, and more than a quarter of transgender and nonbinary youth (27%) who participated in sports reported their grades as being mostly A's compared to 19% who did not.¹

¹ The Well-being of LGBTQ Youth Athletes (August 2020)

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/LGBTQ-Youth-Sports-and-Well-Being-Research-Brief.pdf>

Additionally, research shows that denying equal access to school activities adds to the discrimination transgender and nonbinary youth experience, exposing them to an increased risk of experiencing depressed mood, seriously considering suicide, and attempting suicide.² Research from The Trevor Project published in September 2021 found that most LGBTQ youth don't participate in sports (68%), and many choose not to out of fear of discrimination or bullying for being LGBTQ.³ Further, Trevor's 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that transgender and nonbinary youth who reported their school to be gender-affirming reported lower rates of attempting suicide compared to those who did not.⁴

Finally, we hope the legislature will keep in mind the effect of its actions on LGBTQ youth mental health directly; this past year, more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth seriously considered suicide and 1 in 5 attempted suicide.⁵ According to a recent national poll, three-quarters of LGBTQ youth are following recent news about issues that impact the transgender community. When asked how the debate about this legislation is affecting them, more than four in five transgender and nonbinary (85%) report it has impacted their mental health negatively, causing them to feel stressed, nervous, or scared. 71% of transgender and nonbinary youth actually feel scared about their future.⁶

Recent research has also found that when transgender youth are supported and affirmed, they benefit significantly. For example, one study found that "allowing children to present in everyday life as their gender identity rather than their natal sex is associated with developmentally normative levels of depression and anxiety."⁷ When transgender youth are supported by their families, there is "clear evidence that transgender children have levels of anxiety and depression no different from their nontransgender siblings."⁸ Transgender students experience a greater rates of

² Price-Feeney, Green, and Dorison, "Understanding the Mental Health of Transgender and Nonbinary Youth." Journal of Adolescent Health, 2020.

³ The Trevor Project (2021). Research Brief: LGBTQ Youth Sports Participation. Available at <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/lgbtq-youth-sports-participation-2/>

⁴ The Trevor Project. "National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2021," May 19, 2021. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/>

⁵ The Trevor Project. "National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2021," May 19, 2021. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/>

⁶ Morning Consult. "Issues Affecting LGBTQ Youth: Polling Analysis," January, 2022. https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/TrevorProject_Public1.pdf.

⁷ Kristina R. Olson et al., *Mental Health of Transgender Children Who Are Supported in Their Identities*, 137 Pediatrics 1, 5, 7 (2016), <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/137/3/e20153223.full.pdf>.

⁸ Id. at 7.

emotional distress not because of their gender identity, but because of persistent discrimination and stigma from society - of which this bill and the debating surrounding it are a part.

Legislation like HF 2309 is neither necessary nor helpful. We can both celebrate girls' athletics and protect transgender youth from discrimination at the same time, ensuring that all young people can access the benefits that sports afford.

For these reasons, The Trevor Project asks that you please oppose HF 2309. Thank you.