October 27, 2020

Senator Kelly Loeffler
131 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Greg Steube
521 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Loeffler and Representative Steube,

As chairmen of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Catholic Education and Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage, we write to support your bills, S. 4649 and H.R. 5702, the Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act.

True education aims at the formation of the human person as a unity of body, soul and spirit, and the common good of society.\(^1\) It therefore includes components beyond academics, such as the social and physical aspects of athletics. As Pope Francis has said, "The Church is interested in sport because the person is at her heart, the whole person, and she recognizes that sports activity affects the formation, relations and spirituality of a person."\(^2\) In education and in sports, we must seek to avoid anything that debases human dignity, including rejection of a person’s body or unequal treatment between men and women. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 was a needed landmark to establish equal educational opportunities for women and girls. S. 4649 and H.R. 5702 would help ensure the continued viability of Title IX.

Youth who experience gender identity discordance should be assured the right to participate in, or try-out for, student athletics on the same terms as any of their peers, in co-educational activities or, where sexes are separated, in accord with their given sex. Harassment or unjust discrimination against them in this regard is unequivocally immoral. Conversely, a loving response which affirms the value of persons as fellow human beings helps them to develop a genuine peace with their mind and body, rather than facilitating drastic “transitions” in pursuit of an identity fully independent of their physical body.

This has particular relevance in athletics, where male competition in activities designated for women and girls can be both unfair and, especially in high-contact sports, unsafe. It is true that some women have excelled in these events with men. But any time a policy facilitating such male competition takes an athletic opportunity away from a female, it is a loss for basic fairness and the spirit of Title IX.

Such challenges will be increasingly common as the number of persons experiencing gender identity discordance rises steeply, especially among adolescents.\(^3\) In general, males possess distinct physical advantages in a number of sports, and this is already playing out in athletic events worldwide.\(^4\) Their stature can also pose physical safety concerns in high-contact sports. Neither of these concerns is remediated by cross-sex hormone procedures which are required by some athletic associations for participation in sports of the opposite sex, as they do not fully address disparities in average muscle mass, bone characteristics, and lung capacity once puberty is underway (which is typically the case for student athletes).\(^5\) Further, the safety of the students who undergo hormone treatments themselves is at risk when such procedures, with unproven long-term results in developing bodies, are the recommended means to participate in the sport they love.\(^6\) We
reiterate the need for these students to be welcomed without reservation into appropriate athletic opportunities.

The Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act would address these increasing questions in the important context of education, from primary school through college, and reestablish a fair and safe playing field for all children and young adults. We can do better by all students, and should continue to uphold the progress made with Title IX in promoting the opportunities for women and girls. We appreciate the opportunity to support S. 4649 and H.R. 5702, and urge your respective colleagues to sign on as cosponsors of this important measure.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Signature]

Most Rev. Michael C. Barber, S.J.  
Bishop of Oakland  
Chairman, Committee on Catholic Education

Most Rev. David A. Konderla  
Bishop of Tulsa  
Chairman, Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage


2 Pope Francis, Address to the Italian Tennis Federation, Rome, May 8, 2015.

3 Abigail Shrier, “How ‘peer contagion’ may play into the rise of teen girls transitioning,” New York Post (Jun. 27, 2020); Samuel P. Veissière, “Why is Transgender Identity on the Rise Among Teens?” Psychology Today (Nov. 28, 2018); Gordon Rayner, “Minister orders inquiry into 4,000 per cent rise in children wanting to change sex,” The Telegraph (Sep. 16, 2018); Georgiann Davis, “More people are identifying as trans and gender nonconforming. Why?” Houston Chronicle (Jul. 9, 2018); Lindsay Tanner, “More U.S. teens identify as transgender, survey finds,” USA Today (Feb. 5, 2018).

