



Testimony before Ohio Senate Government Oversight Committee

Enact Ohio Saving Adolescents from Experimentation (SAFE) Act
2nd Hearing, Proponent

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Independent Women's Voice
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Good morning, Honorable Chairman Roegner and Government Oversight Committee.

My name is Riley Gaines, and I am a Spokeswoman for Independent Women's Voice. I urge you to pass HB 68 to protect female athletes, particularly at the collegiate level where the physical differences, risks of injury and loss of potential opportunities afforded to female athletes are greatest.

Prior to joining IW, I was a student at the University of Kentucky where I was a member of UK's Women's Swim and Dive Team. I proudly finished my career as a 12x NCAA All-American, 5x SEC champion, SEC record holder in the 200 butterfly making me the 10th fastest American of all time in the event, and 2x Olympic trial qualifier.

On March 17th, 2022, my teammates and I, as well as female swimmers from universities around the country, were forced to compete against a biological male named Lia Thomas. Thomas was allowed to compete in the women's division after competing as a member of the University of Pennsylvania Men's Swim Team for three years. We watched on the side of the pool as Thomas swam to a national title in the 500-yard freestyle, beating out the most impressive and accomplished female swimmers in the country, including Olympians and American record holders. (Previously, Thomas had been ranked in the 400ths – at best – in the men's division.)

The next day, I raced Thomas in the 200-yard freestyle. We tied. And, yet, NCAA officials told me that the trophy belonged to Thomas. The officials claimed this was necessary for public relations. I was shocked. I felt betrayed and belittled, reduced to a photo-op. But my feelings did not matter. What mattered to the NCAA were the feelings of a biological male.

And that's not all. From the beginning, the female athletes who objected to Thomas's participation in women's swimming were told to remain silent. The gaslighting of female swimmers has felt intimidating at times. But I will not be silent. I will tell people the truth about my experience, and I will do my best to speak for those female athletes who have been threatened into submission.

Unfortunately, Lia Thomas was not a one off. Across the country, and across various sports, female athletes are losing not only titles and awards to males, but also roster spots and opportunities to compete. There are numerous documented instances of males competing in women's track, cross country, swimming, basketball, volleyball, field hockey and other sports at all levels of competition. At the high school level, the participation of male athletes on women's teams is one of the most underreported stories in the country.

But the inclusion of male athletes in women's sports not only takes opportunities from female players. It puts women and girls at greater risk of injury.

In September of last year, North Carolina high school volleyball player [Payton McNabb](#) suffered serious injury after a trans-identified male player spiked a ball at her head, estimated to be approximately 760 miles per hour. Payton experienced trauma to her head and neck and long term concussion symptoms.

Just a few weeks ago in [Massachusetts](#), a male player on the Swanscott High School Field Hockey team injured an opposing player with a shot to the face, sending the female athlete to the hospital with significant facial and dental injuries.

Here in Ohio, Oberlin College effectively ousted its long-time women's lacrosse coach [Kim Russell](#) after expressing her personal opinion on social

media that males should not be allowed to compete in competitions designated for women. For supporting female athletes, she was disciplined by administrators and harassed by students.

Colleges and universities should be fighting for athletes and for the coaches who speak up for them. There's a place for everyone to play sports in this country. But unsafe, unfair and discriminatory practices towards women must stop. And the silencing of those who speak out for women must stop.

It's time to ensure Oberlin College and other institutions of higher education in Ohio stop undermining the integrity of women's sports and discriminating against women.

I ask members of this committee to please support efforts to keep women's sports female, ***particularly at the college level, where the stakes are highest and risks are greatest.***

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience and hope you really, truly, heard my story and consider the facts, the science, and the growing volume of female athletes who are speaking up.

I urge you to pass OH 68 so female college athletes today and in the future do not face discrimination in their own sports.

Thank you.