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I am testifying in opposition to this anti-trans bill.

I am a cisgender woman and grew up participating in school sports, including soccer and cross-country. I also grew up with tight, meaningful, and wonderful friendships with queer and transgender kids. Being a kid in middle school is pretty much universally challenging, but being a young person, ten or twelve years old, and struggling with gender identity issues and a fear of being rejected by your community, bullied, and relentlessly targeted makes it all the more difficult. My trans friends struggled with severe mental health challenges and suicidal ideation when we were growing up. We ran on the cross-country team together. I was never a very good athlete, and that never mattered very much. Cross-country, to me, was a place to exercise and train with my friends and classmates, and it was, I think, a lifeline for a particular trans friend of mine.

I always found the best parts of school sports were being part of a team, and exercising and learning in community. During the sometimes excruciating awkwardness and loneliness of adolescence, having friends, routines, exercise, and a sense of belonging, means everything. Again, I was never going to win a single cross-country race. But even if I were a star athlete, I would choose, every single time, to pass up on gold medals and trophies if it meant my friends, and all trans kids, could maintain participation in an activity that meant so much.

I believe this issue, the motivation behind bills like this, is, probably on its face, about protecting women like me, about protecting young girls, but that isn't really what is at stake here. What is at stake is, on the one hand, maybe slightly diminishing the chances that young cis girls will win first and second places in individual sports, and on the other hand, the mental health and safety of a population of young people who are already extremely vulnerable. Trans kids are at extremely high risks of bullying, mental illness, and suicide already, and research has shown that by merely accepting trans kids for who they are and including them in community drastically improves outcomes. When you're considering this bill, please think about the importance of those two things in context. What matters more -- kids winning competitions, or kids staying alive???

Please vote against this bill.