

My name is Samantha deGroff, and I live in Liberty, Maine.

I am writing today in support of LD868. I had the great fortune to grow up in Washington, Maine and participate in multiple sports throughout my youth.

While I was never a star athlete I treasure the times I was active on the court or field, learning valuable skills that have helped me throughout my life. I also had the pleasure of keeping the books for the 7th and 8th grade boys' and girls' basketball teams in the mid-2000s at the former D.R. Gaul Middle School in Union, Maine. It was such a wonderful experience to see young athletes build their skills, communication, and teamwork at such a formative time in their lives. It is unfortunate that shortsightedness threatens girls' and young women's potential to compete, and even more troubling, their safety. Allowing biological males to compete with girls and young women puts them at a disadvantage both on and off the field. Biological males are genetically stronger and faster than women because they carry more muscle mass. They typically are more aggressive in their play style than women are, which can be very serious when women are forced to compete against men. This often leads to injuries for the women and girls competing, and can be extremely discouraging.

In addition to genetic differences, placing women and girls on a non-consensual co-ed team can negatively affect their self-confidence and self-worth. For a female of any age to practice hard only to be benched game after game because her biological male teammate(s) will always outperform her, devalues her skills and establishes that she has no place in sports. What are we instilling in our young female athletes by giving them this message? By telling them they must comply to be on a team with biological males when they have not given their consent and have no choice in the matter? The ramifications go beyond fairness on the field, reaching into college and beyond. Many young women aspiring to compete in college or university rely on scholarships to afford attending more prestigious institutions that champion women's sports. If they are overshadowed by their biological male counterparts on the field and court their hopes of attaining those scholarships and opportunities are much further out of reach. If they're unable to play, or don't spend as much time competing, recruiters never see their value and skill.

I put myself in the shoes (or cleats) of these women and girls who struggle with their desire to play sports for fun and/or competition. Their voices have been silenced, and their consent revoked. Step in line with the new normal and put yourself in danger of injury. Submit to having a biological male in your locker room or forfeit competing in a sport you've practiced for years. Sit silently on the bench while your biological male teammate(s) take priority. For decades, we have taught women and girls that they matter, deserve safety, and have every right to compete in sports. Allowing biological men and boys to play in the same space as women and girls contradicts the messaging we have been saying to them. I urge you to commit to empowering women and girls by upholding LD868.

Samantha Degroff  
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