

Timeline of “Save Women’s Sports” Act in Ohio

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Ohio is one of many states that have introduced legislation restricting or banning transgender athletes, specifically transgender women, from competing in women’s sports. This timeline documents the journey of the “Save Women’s Sports Act” in the state legislature, where it currently stands today, and the current guidelines for trans student-athletes in Ohio.

FEB. 25, 2020

State Representative Jena Powell, who represents the 80th House District, announced plans to introduce the Save Women’s Sports Act (HB 61). The legislation designated that sports teams are separated by “biological sex of an individual, meaning that biological males cannot play on female teams.” If an athlete’s sex was disputed, it would have to be confirmed by a physician’s note. The bill would protect schools and colleges from being penalized and would protect cisgender students from retaliation by schools or colleges and provide them a private right of action if they were uncomfortable with a transgender woman playing on their team.



FEB. 3, 2021

HB 61, sponsored by Powell and 15 other Republican representatives, was formally introduced in the House. It moved to the Committee on Primary and Secondary Education the next day.

MAR. 16, 2021

Senate Bill 132 was introduced and sponsored by Kristina Roegner, who represents the 27th House District. Much of its content was similar to the content in HB 61. The bill moved to the Committee on Workforce and Higher Education the next day.

JUN. 25, 2021

The contents of House Bill 61 were added as a floor amendment to Senate Bill 187. SB 187 would allow college athletes to earn compensation for their name, image, and likeness.

JUN. 28, 2021

Governor Mike DeWine signed an executive action allowing college athletes in Ohio to profit on their name, image and likeness, effectively bypassing SB 187 and the HB 61 amendment, the latter of which he publicly denounced, saying that it’s up to leagues and athletic associations to best determine policies.

“ This issue is best addressed outside of government, through individual sports leagues and athletic associations, including the Ohio High School Athletic Association, who can tailor policies to meet the needs of their member athletes and member institutions. ”

JUN. 2, 2022

HB 61 was added as an amendment to HB 151 and passed the House 57–30. HB 151 originally addressed the Ohio Teacher’s Mentorship Program. Republicans also added more requirements — if an athlete’s sex was disputed, a physician’s note would be needed and they could be subjected to internal and external exams, or “genital inspections,” as well as testosterone checks, an addition that received national attention and criticism.



▲ Chandler Rupert speaks at a protest.

Photo Courtesy of Kyle Richardson

◀ Protesters hold up signs in support of transgender athletes.

Photo Courtesy of Forbes

▼ Ember Zelch testifies against HB 151.

Photo Courtesy of Equality Ohio

DEC. 6, 2022

The Ohio Senate Committee on Secondary and Public Education replaced the requirement of internal and external exams with a birth certificate requirement. Also removed was the authorization for athletes to file for civil action if they are negatively affected by a violation of the bill’s requirements or if they suffer from retaliation for reporting violations. The ACLU of Ohio denounced the amendment to HB 151.

“Passing HB 151 in its amended form is the quintessential example of how rushed and ill-advised lame-duck legislating can be. As you all know, this bill passed the House with HB 61 tacked on as a floor amendment after a mini version of lame-duck prior to the summer recess. Instead of stripping out HB 61’s provisions, which are wholly unrelated to the intent of HB 151, this committee may decide to keep them, rush the bill to the Senate floor, and send it back to the House for concurrence.”

DEC. 14, 2022

The Senate passed the bill 23–7; however, it did not make it through the final House 46–41. Republicans added Senate Bill 178 as an amendment to HB 151, which would overhaul the Ohio Department of Education. As of this time, only four transgender girls were approved by OHSAA to compete on the women’s team. If the bill were to pass, they would be allowed to continue their season, but other transgender athletes would be banned. Republicans also removed this provision to colleges and universities.

“If you really actually cared about girls’ sports, maybe you could put your energy towards the fact that girls still don’t have fair facilities,” Minna Zelch said. Zelch is the mother of Ember, the only transgender girl on a varsity team in the state. “My daughter plays on a field at the elementary school that floods every time there is a drop of rain while the boys have two beautiful new fields.”



What happens next?

SB 132 and HB 151 are dead. The former never made it out of committee and has not been voted on since the 134th General Assembly ended, and the latter failed to make it out of the House. However, the contents from either bill could be introduced or added as an amendment to an unrelated bill in the next session, which is something Senate President Matt Huffman expects.

What are the current regulations for transgender athletes in Ohio?

Currently, regulation on transgender athletes is provided by OHSAA for high school athletes and the NCAA for colleges.

According to OHSAA regulations, trans men can compete on either the men’s or women’s teams if they are not undergoing hormone replacement therapy, but must be on the men’s team once they start and must “demonstrate to the Executive Director’s Office by way of sound medical evidence that the muscle mass developed as a result of this testosterone treatment does not exceed the muscle mass that is typical of an adolescent genetic boy.” If testosterone amounts are over the acceptable limit, the athlete would be monitored every three to six months. Transgender women who are not undergoing hormone replacement therapy must stay on the men’s team, but are allowed to compete on the women’s team after at least one year of HRT and blood work proving that testosterone levels are lower than certain levels or medical evidence that they do not “possess physical (bone structure, muscle mass, testosterone, hormonal, etc.) or physiological advantages over genetic females of the same age group.” Athletes need to reapply every year. Since 2015, 15 transgender girls have been approved to play for women’s teams. No transgender athletes have won a high school state championship in Ohio.

The NCAA’s policy is similar to OHSAA’s. They updated it at the end of the 2021–22 season, announcing that participation of trans athletes would now be on a sport-by-sport basis. The policy is in phase two of implementation for the 2022–23 school year. All transgender athletes need to document testosterone levels three times — the first at the beginning of the season, a second six months later, and the third a month prior to championships.