

April 17, 2023

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker McCarthy and Minority Leader Jeffries:

On behalf of the more than 165,000 physicians and medical students our organizations represent, we write in opposition to H.R. 734, the so-called “Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act of 2023”. Our organizations share a commitment to improving the physical and mental health of all Americans—regardless of gender identity—and are concerned about the health and well-being of transgender student athletes who are excluded from participating in school sports consistent with their gender identity.

Our organizations strive to improve health care access and eliminate disparities for children and young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning of their sexual or gender identity. Any discrimination based on gender identity or expression, real or perceived, is damaging to the socioemotional health of children, families, and society.ⁱ Despite some advances in public awareness and legal protections, youth who identify as LGBTQ continue to face disparities, including from inequitable laws and policies, societal discrimination, and a lack of access to quality health care, including mental health care.

H.R. 734 attempts to ban transgender female students from participating in school sports consistent with their gender identity. If allowed to go into effect, this ban may lead to severe adverse consequences for the health and well-being of transgender female students. Forcing a transgender female student to participate in a sports team identifying as a cisgender male is likely to exacerbate the harmful effects of gender dysphoria, a clinically significant distress resulting from the incongruence between one’s gender identity and the sex assigned to the individual at birth, and goes against the medical consensus to treat gender dysphoria by supporting the transgender individual in living her life according to her gender identity.^{ii,iii}

Involvement in sports, particularly as a member of a sports team, is an integral way for youth to develop psychosocially and help form their social identity. Sports participation helps athletes develop self-esteem, correlates positively with overall mental health, and appears to have a protective effect against suicide.^{iv} Forcing transgender children to play on teams according to their sex assigned at birth, rather than the gender they live in, undermines their ability to belong to their community. Alternatively, if they refuse to identify as a cisgender male, transgender female students may be forced to forgo student athletics entirely, depriving them of the myriad benefits—including social, physical and mental-health benefits—that such sports can provide.

In order to ensure that all children and young people have the opportunity to thrive, we strongly urge you to oppose H.R. 734.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Psychiatric Association

ⁱ Rafferty J. Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children and Adolescents. Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, Committee on Adolescence and Section on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Health and Wellness. *Pediatrics*. Oct 2018, 142 (4) e20182162; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2162>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Health care for transgender and gender diverse individuals. ACOG Committee Opinion No. 823. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. *Obstet Gynecol* 2021;137:e75–88.

^{iv} Logan, K, Cuff, S, and the AAP Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness. Organized Sports for Children, Preadolescents, and Adolescents. *Pediatrics*. 2019; 143(6); 2019-0997.