Statement of Support of Transgender Youth
April 2021

Pediatricians across the state stand with and support North Carolina’s youth, including transgender athletes. The North Carolina Pediatric Society, the state chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, stands in opposition of HB 358, the “Save Women’s Sports Act”, which seeks to ban transgender youth from participating in sports. Research demonstrates this exclusionary approach is likely to cause harm to the health and well-being of youth. Current NC policy guiding such decisions seeks to maximize participation by student athletes to compete on a level playing field in a safe, competitive and friendly environment, free from discrimination.

Participation in high school athletics promotes physical and socioemotional well-being. Sports teach young people about leadership, self-discipline, and teamwork while building a sense of self and belonging with peers. When transgender girls are excluded from these teambuilding activities with other girls on basis of their sex assigned at birth, they are more likely to feel isolation and discrimination. This is especially troubling in light of the high risk of depression and suicide in transgender youth.

Transgender youth - like all youth - need support of adults. About 3% of youth identify as transgender or are questioning or gender diverse. Transgender youth are at high risk of depression and self-harm with over 50% of transgender youth having considered suicide and a third having attempted it. Risk of suicide rises with bullying, exclusion, rejection, and lack of societal support and affirmation. Children whose gender identity is affirmed are at lower risk of suicide than those who are referred to as their assigned sex at birth. When policymakers and other leaders promote inclusion and affirmation, they send a powerful message. Forcing transgender children to play on teams according to their assigned sex at birth rather than their gender identity undermines their ability to build and belong to community, including inclusive sporting environments.

HB358 relies on a determination of sex - and that is not always straightforward. As pediatricians, we know that genitalia are sometimes ambiguous. Some people are identified with ambiguous genitalia in infancy, during puberty, or even into adulthood. This bill proposes to exclude these children, while also risking that elements of personal medical history be made public or perhaps requiring invasive physical exams for the sake of sports participation.
Furthermore, currently there is no direct or consistent research suggesting transgender children have an athletic advantage.\textsuperscript{vi} The North Carolina High School Athletic Association passed a comprehensive policy in 2019 to provide guidance on athletic team assignment for children based on gender identity.\textsuperscript{viii} Attempting to anticipate future concerns while creating unnecessary barriers to inclusion for all transgender youth creates psychological harm without allowing for creativity and a gender-affirming nonjudgmental approach.

In response to similar legislation nationally, the president of the American Academy of Pediatrics, pediatrician Dr. Lee Beers recently wrote,

“We are in the middle of a pandemic that has led to staggering rises in mental health concerns among children and teens. Transgender children had statistically higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation even before the pandemic...Playing on sports teams helps youth develop self-esteem, correlates positively with overall mental health, and appears to have a protective effect against suicide. (This bill) not only ignores these recommendations; it undermines them.”

Transgender children, like all children, just want to belong. This legislation sends a powerful and harmful message to all children. It teaches exclusion over inclusion and self over other. It is unlikely to make any significant difference in sports outcomes but is quite likely to cause substantial psychological harm to already vulnerable children during an already devastating year.

Pediatricians who regularly care for transgender youth know that transgender children are kind, smart, strong, creative, and brave. Transgender children are loved. Transgender children belong in North Carolina. We, their pediatricians, stand in support of transgender children.


\textsuperscript{ii} https://www.aappublications.org/news/2019/10/14/suicide101419 See also, Johns 2017


\textsuperscript{iv} Olson KR, Durwood L, DeMeules M, McLaughlin KA 2016 Mental health of transgender children who are supported in their identities Pediatrics 137 (3):


\textsuperscript{vii} North Carolina High School Athletic Association Student Requirements for Interscholastic Athletic Participation. Last accessed March 24, 2021: https://www.nchsaa.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Section%201.pdf