

# House approves trans athlete ban for girls and women’s teams

By KEVIN FREKING April 20, 2023



WASHINGTON (AP) — Transgender athletes whose biological sex assigned at birth was male would be barred from competing on girls or women’s sports teams at federally supported schools and colleges under legislation pushed through Thursday by House Republicans checking off another high-profile item on their social agenda.

The bill approved by a 219-203 party-line vote is unlikely to advance further because the Democratic-led Senate will not support it and the White House said President Joe Biden would veto it.

Supporters said the legislation, which would put violators at risk of losing taxpayer dollars, is necessary to ensure competitive fairness. They framed the vote as supporting female athletes disadvantaged by having to compete against those whose gender identify does not match their sex assigned at birth.

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Opponents criticized the bill as ostracizing an already vulnerable group merely for political gain.

The House action comes as at least 20 other states have imposed similar limits on trans athletes at the K-12 or collegiate level.

The bill would amend landmark civil rights legislation, known as Title IX, passed more than 50 years ago. It would prohibit recipients of federal money from permitting a person “whose sex is male” to participate in programs designated for women or girls. The bill defines sex as “based solely on a person’s reproductive biology and genetics at birth.”

The sponsor, Rep. Greg Steube, R-Fla., highlighted the case of Emma Weyant, a resident of his district and a 2020 member of the U.S. Olympic swimming team who finished second in the NCAA women’s 500-yard freestyle championship last year. She was defeated by Lia Thomas, who had competed for three years on the University of Pennsylvania men’s swimming team before joining the women’s team.

“The integrity of women’s sports must be protected,” Steube said.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., said it was a “great day for America, a great day for girls and women and for fairness in sports.”

Democrats said every child regardless of gender identify deserves the opportunity to belong to a team and that preventing competitors from doing so sends the message that they don’t matter.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., who has a transgender daughter, said Republicans were cruelly scapegoating transgender children to score political points. She said three-quarters of transgender students report having experienced harassment or discrimination at school and many have considered suicide.

“These bills tell some of the most vulnerable children in our country that they do not belong,” Jayapal said. “Shame on you.”

Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis., said most people in the United States don’t know anyone who is transgender and that can create fear for politicians to exploit. The bill, he said, does nothing to address the severe inequities in the resources dedicated to men’s and women’s sports.

He highlighted the stance taken by Gov. Spencer Cox, R-Utah, who last year vetoed a bill banning transgender students from playing girls sports. Cox said: “I struggle to understand so much of it and the science is conflicting. When in doubt however, I always try to err on the side of kindness, mercy and compassion.”

Pocan noted that in Utah at the time of the veto there were four transgender players out of 85,000 competing in high school sports, with only one competing in girls sports.

“There’s your raging national problem,” Pocan said. “What’s the Republicans response to this nonexistent issue? Hurt kids for being kids.”



In a message this week threatening a veto, the White House said that being part of a team is an important part of growing up, staying engaged in school and learning leadership and life skills. It said a national ban that does not account for competitiveness or grade level targets people for who they are and is discriminatory.

The administration also has issued a proposed rule that would prevent any school or college that receives federal money from imposing a “one-size-fits-all” policy that categorically bans trans students from playing on sports teams consistent with their gender identity. Such policies would be considered a violation of Title IX.

Any limits would have to consider the sport, the level of competition and the age of students. Elementary school students would generally be allowed to participate on any teams consistent with their gender identity, for example. More competitive teams at high schools and colleges could add limits, but those would be discouraged in teams that don’t have tryouts or cuts.

“We don’t want biological men taking away the achievements of women who fought so hard to get where they are today,” said Rep. Nancy Mace, R-S.C., the first woman to graduate from The Citadel military college.

It was the latest proposal by newly empowered Republicans to win over parents concerned about what their children are experiencing in school.

But Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, R-Iowa, assessing Thursday’s action, said, “Make no mistake, this is not a culture war.” She spoke of those who “are trying to diminish and erase who we are as women and I will not stand for it.”

Last month, the House passed a measure that would require schools to publish course studies and a list of books kept in libraries, as well as affirm parents’ ability to meet with educators, speak at school board meetings and examine school budgets. That legislation is also not expected to advance, though it gives House supporters the chance to promote their vote for it during next year’s election.

The American Civil Liberties Union condemned the vote and said that so far this year, more than 450 bills attacking the rights of transgender people have been introduced in state legislatures.

“Why are Republicans in Congress spending their time bullying children? This is not what voters elected them to do,” said Deirdre Schifeling, the ACLU’s national political director.