

My name is Grace, and I'm submitting this testimony today in opposition to SF 960.

I am a Minnesota high school student. I am a teenage girl. I am the captain of my school's tennis team and cheerleader squad. And I am transgender.

Playing school sports is a huge part of my high school experience--the typical kind of high school experience anyone would want. For me, sports was a place to hang with my friends and be part of a team. I learned the values of teamwork and self-discipline. I worked hard, and after a few years I was made captain – and not because I'm the best one on the team; my athletic abilities put me squarely in the middle of the pack. My team picked me to be captain because, to be honest, I put in the work and people really like me.

I'm tremendously lucky – I was never challenged to prove that I had the right to play, and that's a luxury not everyone has. But there was always this anxiety that at any moment, I'd have to justify myself to adults I don't know, to show them my personal medical forms and say, *"No, I belong here. I do. This is my team. This is where I can be myself."*

A huge part of high school is wanting to fit in. I know so many girls say they want to stand out, but most of us spend high school just trying to fit in. There's safety in fitting in. The anti-trans language in this bill singles us out. It targets middle schoolers, high schoolers, and young people who are just starting out in life, starting to be independent. For transgender girls like me, who have been playing sports alongside their classmates for years and who should be focusing on practice like everyone else, it's a terrible reminder that we could have it all taken away. We could lose all we've worked for, our futures, our friends, and be targeted just for being who we are.

The amount of time I spend wondering if this could all end is crippling. It's nerve-wracking, and it's scary. But what's always given me comfort and hope are my sports, tennis and cheer. When I would walk into my high school wearing my cheer uniform, I was so proud. I knew I belonged. That's a feeling every kid deserves to have. That's what high school should be about!

There are people who take great pride in their gender identity, and I'm one of them! But at the same time, I'm tired of fighting for the right to exist. Yes I'm a trans girl, but I'm not only a trans girl. I want to go to school and enjoy the rest of my senior year. I'm excited to start college in the fall. I hope to play on my college tennis team. I want to do well in my PSEO classes. I don't want to live in fear for being who I am.

If lawmakers want to talk about supporting girls' and women's sports, then let's have that conversation. There are real problems in girls' and women's sports--racism, sexism, abuse, pay disparities and lack of educational opportunities to name a few. The problem is, the only time some lawmakers talk about girls and women, it involves putting someone else down. If they'd actually like to support girls and women in sports, they can – with funding, and resources, and by weeding out predatory coaches. Nothing is stopping lawmakers from supporting girls and women's sports if that's really what they want to do. But stop using one marginalized group as a prop to harm another. It's hurtful, and it avoids the actual issues.

Lawmakers who haven't taken the time to sit down with transgender children and really try to understand our experiences should do so. Perhaps then they would rethink this awful campaign against us. I hope that by sharing my experience with members of this committee, you will all vote against SF 960. Thank you.

Grace Walker
Minnesota High School Senior