

Discussions On Transgender Girls In School Sports Continues In The Legislature

By JESSICA LOWELL

JUN 17, 2021

KPCW

<https://www.kpcw.org/post/discussions-transgender-girls-school-sports-continues-legislature#stream/0>

Audio: <https://cpa.ds.npr.org/kpcw/audio/2021/06/17-Randy-Jessica-Sports.mp3>

The discussion on whether transgender girls should play sports was revived during an interim legislative committee meeting.

Republican Summit County Rep. Kera Birkeland introduced a bill last legislative session that would have banned transgender girls from playing on school sports teams. After passing the House, it died in a Senate Committee meeting.

During an interim committee meeting Tuesday, Birkeland promised there will be another bill on the topic in the future. Her reason for pursuing this topic hasn't changed.

"One thing that is important to me is that when talking about preserving women's sports, and youth participation in sports, that we do not downplay or degrade the hard work, sacrifice and dedication that it takes to be a top level female athlete," Birkeland said.

During the legislative session, critics of the bill said there are no examples of transgender girls trying to play on school teams. During Tuesday's meeting, Birkeland said she's since heard of some examples.

But Sue Robbins with Equality Utah said evidence of transgender girls playing sports is sparse.

"The strong concerns about this being a large issue are misplaced in my mind, as targeting the only transgender girls who are successful across all states ... would indicate that any success by our community would be met with attempts to take that small level of pride and inclusion away from us," Robbins said.

Democratic Rep. Suzanne Harrison is on the interim committee. During the discussion, she said there are other hurdles women have to face as athletes.

"Transgender athletes were never a threat to women's sports," Henderson said. "From my perspective, the main threat was the existing system. The fact that half the time our games never got announced. We got the crummy practice time on the crappiest field and the worst game times. These are the problems in women's sports, the real threats to equality and women's sports."

The NCAA requires transgender women must have received hormone treatment for at least one year in order to play collegiate sports. High schools throughout Utah have the same rule in place. However junior highs don't have any regulations.

The NCAA tests testosterone levels, but the practice doesn't carry over to state high schools. At the meeting, lawmakers brought up the possibility of testing. But Birkeland said that's a pricey option.

"Parents, administrators at schools and athletes hated the test to play," she said. "Can you imagine monthly testosterone testing of all athletes? Because it would require testing all athletes, you cannot discriminate and pick and choose who to test. The cost would be enormous to our state to do so in junior high and high school." Birkeland scheduled a series of roundtable discussions about women's sports, which will begin in July. She's also planned work meetings with Equality Utah and the ACLU, who both oppose banning trans girls from playing sports.

Editor's note: This story has been updated to correct wrong attributions.