

WOMEN'S LAW PROJECT

Safeguarding Rights, Creating Opportunities

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Statement of Terry Fromson, Managing Attorney Women's Law Project

The Women's Law Project is pleased to join in this celebration of National Girls and Women in Sports Day. It is a day to recognize all the incredibly talented and strong young women who have excelled at sports and in so many other facets of their lives because of sports.

This is also a wonderful opportunity to recognize the importance of adopting the high school athletic reporting legislation introduced by Senator White and Representative Briggs. This legislation will help schools, parents, and student athletes address gender inequities that persist in Pennsylvania's high school athletic programs decades after Title IX was enacted.

Title IX, the federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in schools, led to an exponential growth in the number of young women participating in school sports. Opportunities to participate in sport have in turn changed the way young women think about themselves and their bodies. Female athletes are more likely than girls who do not play sports to have higher self-esteem, confidence and GPAs.

In spite of the improvements brought by Title IX, inequities in athletic programs persist in many secondary and post-secondary schools. Female student athletes in Pennsylvania's secondary schools often receive the short end of the stick in terms of equipment, uniforms, fields and facilities, and scheduling of games. Believe me, we know. We get the calls from parents whose daughters don't get to participate in sports because their schools don't offer girls equal

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opportunities to play and who must play on fields whose quality is far below the quality of the fields on which their sons play.

Senate Bill 890 and House Bill 2061 will provide Pennsylvania's secondary schools with an important tool to monitor their compliance with the law. The data schools collect will serve as a self audit and help them avoid expensive and lengthy litigation. Once schools are on notice about their need to comply with Title IX, they can take proactive steps and collaborate with students and their families to provide equal athletic opportunities.

The data will also let parents and students know where their school stands so they can hold their schools accountable. Parents and students should know whether their school is treating its young women fairly.

This data has been available on the college level since 1994 when Congress passed the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act. Under the EADA, as it is known, colleges and universities annually publish a report on athletic participation and treatment broken down by gender. This information is posted on the U.S. Department of Education's website and is easily accessible to anyone who wants to know how a particular school is treating its young women. Since this data became available, there have been significant gains in the number of college women participating in athletics.

Similar gains are being seen in Kentucky and Georgia, states that adopted reporting requirements for secondary schools a decade ago. Pennsylvania's secondary school students deserve to receive the benefits that this legislation can bring.

The Women's Law Project thanks Representative Briggs and Senator White for recognizing the importance of sports in the lives of young women.

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The Women's Law Project, a non-profit women's legal advocacy organization with offices in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. Our website is www.womenslawproject.org.