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Open letter: PIAA's revised policies and statement restricting transgender students' participation in school athletics violate state and federal law

The Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association's deference to the Trump administration's discriminatory executive order targeting transgender and gender-expansive student-athletes is unlawful. The executive order does not carry the force of law or supersede state or federal law.

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PENNSYLVANIA // March 6, 2025: Today, Women's Law Project and Education Law Center sent an open letter to Dr. Robert A. Lombardi, executive director of the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association, Inc. (PIAA), and the PIAA board of directors, stating that the association's revised policies and statements regarding transgender student athletes' participation in middle and high school athletics violate both state and federal law.

The ACLU of Pennsylvania, Fairness Pennsylvania, GLSEN, Planned Parenthood Association of Pennsylvania, and Public Education Advocates of Lancaster County also signed the letter, which you can [read here](#).

On February 19, 2025, [the PIAA board of directors voted](#) to remove the "Transgender Policy" from its policy and procedures manual and to amend the "Mixed Gender Participation" provisions of its by-laws that address when a student's sex is questioned, adding a requirement that member schools "consult with their school solicitors relative to compliance" with [Presidential Executive Order 14201](#).

Following the board's actions, PIAA assistant executive director Lyndsay Barna released a statement that the board's "position is the Executive Order is binding to all PIAA Member Schools that accept federal funding."

"The PIAA's recent policy changes are both unnecessary and unlawful," says **Staff Attorney Elizabeth Lester-Abdalla, who authored the letter.** "These actions evoke confusion and fear. I want to assure transgender and gender-expansive students, their families, and the people who love them that they are still legally protected under state and federal law. Transgender Pennsylvanians have legal rights that fearmongering rhetoric alone cannot take away, and we will work to defend them."

Courts have overwhelmingly found that Title IX and the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution provide clear protections from discrimination based on gender identity across all areas of education, including sports. Further, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act makes it clear that transgender individuals have the right not to be discriminated against based on their gender identity. PIAA and public school districts are also bound by the Pennsylvania Constitution, which prohibits discrimination because of sex.

"As our letter makes clear, the president's executive order does not have the force of law or supersede state or federal law," says **Education Law Center Senior Attorney Kristina Moon.** "PIAA should be aligning its policies with the law and protecting trans students against discrimination – not scapegoating students who just want to be able to attend school, be themselves, and participate fully in school activities like everybody else."

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Founded in 1974, Women's Law Project is a public interest legal organization focused on advancing and defending reproductive freedom, LGBTQ+ equality, and gender justice.

The Education Law Center's mission is to ensure access to a quality public education for all children in Pennsylvania.