



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator Jesse James, Chair
Members, Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children
and Families

FROM: Barbara Sella, Executive Director

DATE: December 13, 2023

RE: Support for SB-378, AB-377, SB-377 and AB-378 School Sports Participants

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 378 and Assembly Bill 377, as well as Senate Bill 377 and Assembly Bill 378.

Senate Bill 378 and Assembly Bill 377 impact public schools, private schools participating in a parental choice program, and independent charter schools by requiring that any interscholastic, intramural, or club athletic teams or sports designate the athletic team or sport as falling into one of three categories based on the sex of the participating pupils: 1) participants who are males, men or boys; 2) participants who are females, women, or girls; 3) coed or participants of both sexes. The bill defines “sex” as the sex determined at birth by a physician and reflected on the birth certificate. The bill also requires the educational institution to prohibit a male pupil from participating on an athletic team or in an athletic sport designed for females. Lastly, the bill requires the educational institution to notify pupils and parents if it intends to change a designation for an athletic team or sport. Senate Bill 377 and Assembly Bill 378 have nearly the exact same requirements for any University of Wisconsin institutions and technical colleges that operate intercollegiate, intramural, or club athletic teams or sports.

Pope Francis has said that “The Church is interested in sport because the person is at her heart, the whole person, and she recognizes that sports activity affects the formation, relations and spirituality of a person.” However, while every person should be given the opportunity to take part in sport, it does not follow that every team must be open to all who wish to join, especially when basic fairness and dignity are at stake.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has affirmed that “[i]n education and in sports, we must seek to avoid anything that debases human dignity, including rejection of a person’s body or unequal treatment between men and women. This has particular relevance in athletics, where male competition in activities designated for women and girls can be both unfair and, especially in high-contact sports, unsafe. It is true that some women have excelled in these events with men. But any time a policy facilitating such male competition takes an athletic opportunity away from a female, it is a loss for basic fairness and the spirit of Title IX.”

As Catholics, we believe that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God and is deserving of dignity, respect, and compassion. We know that each person has been given a natural body that is either male or female. And we affirm, as Pope Francis has written, that “[t]he acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation.”

We know that some will feel hurt by this legislation. Even as we support these bills and urge their passage, we ask everyone to see each other as members of one human family. We need to listen to one another and to search for ways that bring about unity and mutual respect.

Thank you.