

September 20, 2017

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20002

RE: Docket ID: ED-2017-OS-0074

Dear Secretary DeVos:

I write to you today to implore you to keep all Title IX rules and regulations in place, especially those which apply to athletics. These regulations are crucial to providing access to sports girls of the US.

As evident through Women's Sports Foundation research, sports provide its participants with lifelong benefits (Staurowsky, 2015). Certainly, health is often improved when an individual participates, but there are other, often less tangible benefits that are earned through a sports experience. Benefits include leadership, workplace advancement, educational achievement, time management, and team work. It is in our best interest as a country to ensure that such benefits are extended equitably to the women of the United States. Now that we are decades into Title IX's implementation, we can see first-hand the strong women who have benefitted from a sports experience and gone on to become successful and contributing members of our society, including doctors, lawyers, politicians, and corporate leaders.

In 1971, a young girl in Connecticut sued for the right to join the boys' cross-country team, as her school did not have a team for girls. In his decision, the judge asserted, "Athletic competition builds character in our boys. We do not need that kind of character in our girls, the women of tomorrow." (as cited in Blumenthal, 2005). Times have changed since that 1971 judicial decision. Our country is a better more prosperous place because women and girls can now access sports in our schools. In fact, labor economist Betsey Stevenson used Title IX as a natural experiment to examine the effect of Title IX on women's education and employment. The results are astounding and prove the need for all of our children to have

“High school athletics confer substantial economic benefits that last throughout participants’ lives. When one compares people with similar educational opportunities, family backgrounds, measures of intelligence and self-esteem, the annual wages of former athletes are, on average, 7 percent higher than nonathletes. Similarly, athletes get almost half a year more education than nonathletes. The gains occur equally for girls and boys...In those states where Title IX led to the greatest expansion in female sports, the post-Title IX generation of women enjoyed more education, employment and higher wages than their pre-Title IX forebears. They were also more likely to enter previously male-dominated professions such as law, accounting and even sports.”(Stevenson & Wolfers, 2012)

The passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 has prompted exponential growth in girls’ and women’s access to school sports opportunities. In 1971-72, girls received less than 300,000 high school sports opportunities and 30,000 collegiate sports opportunities (NFHS, 2016; NCAA, 2016). That number has since skyrocketed to more than 3.3 million participants in high school and nearly 215,000 participants in college (NFHS, 2016; NCAA, 2016). While there is pride to take in the progress made, we must not forget that inequities still persist. Though high school girls have made great strides, high school female athletes in 2015-16 have yet to reach the level of boys’ pre-Title IX participation numbers and they lag behind their male counterparts in current participation rates by more than 1.2 million fewer opportunities (NFHS, 2016). However, this is not for lack of interest. Girls across the country have proven time and time again that they are interested in sports. In fact, girls’ HS participation has increased every year since the 1988-89 school year (NFHS, 2016). Not only do participation inequities exist when looking at the country as a whole, we see that girls of color are doubly hit by race and gender. An analysis by the National Women’s Law Center illustrates this disparity faced by girls of color, finding that heavily minority schools have fewer sports offerings than heavily white schools and 40 percent of heavily minority schools versus 16 percent of heavily white schools, have large gaps between girls’ representation in student body versus their proportional representation in the athletic body.

The existing regulations of Title IX, including the three-part test for participation, ensure that our schools have concrete and tangible ways to

comply with the law. These regulations are essential for ensuring we move towards equity and unleash the full potential of our children. Title IX has done great things for our society but inequities persist for our girls. The current rules and regulations of Title IX, paired with strong enforcement, is crucial to ensuring our country is able to fulfill its promise of an equitable educational experience for both our girls and our boys.

Sincerely,

Deborah Slaner Larkin
Chief Advocacy Officer

References

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