



**Testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee “Protecting Pride:
Defending the Civil Rights of LGBTQ+ Americans”**

**Riley Gaines
Advisor
Independent Women's Voice
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My name is Riley Gaines, and I am an Advisor for Independent Women's Voice. Prior to joining IW, I was a student at the University of Kentucky where I was a member of UK's Women's Swim and Dive Team. I take pride that I finished my career as a 12x NCAA All-American, 5x SEC champion, SEC record holder in the 200 butterfly making me the 10th fastest American of all time in the event, and 2x Olympic trial qualifier.

On March 17th, 2022, my teammates and I, as well as female swimmers from universities around the country, were forced to compete against a biological male named Lia Thomas. Thomas was allowed to compete in the women's division after competing as a member of the University of Pennsylvania Men's Swim Team for three years as Will Thomas. We watched on the side of the pool as Thomas swam to a national title in the 500-yard freestyle, beating out the most impressive and accomplished female swimmers in the country, including Olympians and American record holders. (Previously, Thomas had been ranked in the 400ths — at best — in the men's division.)

The next day, I raced Thomas in the 200-yard freestyle. We tied. We ended up with the same time — down to the hundredth of a second.

Having only one trophy, the NCAA handed it to Thomas and told me I would go home empty-handed because Thomas needed to hold the trophy for photo purposes. I was shocked. I felt betrayed and belittled, reduced to a photo-op. But my feelings did not matter. What mattered to the NCAA were the feelings of a biological male.

In 1972, Congress enacted Title IX to end unjust sex discrimination in all aspects of education, including college athletics. But by allowing Thomas to displace female athletes — in the pool and on the podium — the NCAA intentionally and explicitly discriminated on the basis of sex. Although the NCAA claimed it acted in the name of “inclusion,” its policies, in fact, EXcluded female athletes, the very athletes whom Title IX was passed to protect.

But that is not all. In addition to being forced to give up our awards, our titles, and our opportunities, the NCAA forced me and my female swimmers to share a locker room with Thomas, a 6’4” 22-year-old male equipped with (and exposing) male genitalia. Let me be clear: we were not forewarned. We were not asked for our consent. And we did not give our consent. In swimming locker rooms you’re undressing quickly in front of one another, fully naked. I was forced to take off my swimsuit in front of a man. If nothing else, I truly hope you can see how this is a violation of our right to privacy and how some of us have felt uncomfortable, embarrassed, and even traumatized by the experience.

I know that I do not speak for everyone who competed against Lia Thomas. But I do speak for many. I can attest to the tears that I witnessed from finishers who missed being named an All-American by one place. I can attest to the extreme discomfort in the locker room from 18-year-old girls exposed

to male body parts and having to undress with a male watching in the same room. I can attest to the anger and frustration expressed by girls who had worked so hard and sacrificed so much to get to this moment, only to have to compete in what felt like a farce. And I can attest to the fact that, around the country, female athletes who protested the inclusion of Lia Thomas in the women's division were threatened, intimidated, and emotionally blackmailed into silence and submission.

Unfortunately, our experiences are not unique. The number of female athletes who have been denied opportunities, traumatized, or hurt by policies that claim to promote "inclusion" is growing at an alarming rate. I have heard from female athletes who have been seriously injured – one with permanent injuries that will plague her for the rest of her life – because she was forced to compete against a much physically stronger man. This is simply unacceptable and the integrity of women's sports is lost. It is unfair, and it is discriminatory. And it must stop.

Women's rights to privacy and single-sex spaces and opportunities are being encroached upon — sports, sororities, locker and dorm rooms, shelters, and prisons.

Some have tried to tar those of us speaking up for women's safety, security, and opportunities as "transphobic" or "bigoted." This is untrue.

I've heard from gay, lesbian, and trans-identifying Americans that agree females should not be asked to step aside to make room for male-bodied individuals — no matter how they self identify.

Defending women's rights is not anti-anyone. Believing in biology is not bigoted. And following the science that there are two sexes and that there are very real and important differences between the two sexes is not hateful, it's fact.

I'll end with a quote from tennis legend Martina Navratilova, "[T]here will always be significant numbers of boys and men who would beat the best girls and women in head-to-head competition. Claims to the contrary are simply a denial of science."

I appreciate the opportunity to share my experience and hope you really, truly, heard my story and consider the facts, the science, and the growing stories. Thank you.