



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator Kathy Bernier and the Senate Committee on Human Services, Children and Families
Representative Barbara Dittrich and the Assembly Committee on Education
Representative David Murphy and the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

FROM: Kim Vercauteren, Executive Director, Wisconsin Catholic Conference

DATE: May 26, 2021

RE: Support for AB 195 & 196 and SB 322 & 323, Male, Female, and Coed Athletics

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony on behalf of the Roman Catholic bishops of Wisconsin in support of Assembly Bills 195 and 196 and Senate Bills 322 and 323.

These bills impact public schools, parental choice program schools, and UW System and technical colleges 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 bills define “sex” as the sex assigned or determined at birth by a physician. The bills also require the educational institution to prohibit a male pupil from participating on an athletic team or in an athletic sport designed for females, women, or girls. Lastly, the bills require the educational institution to notify pupils and parents if it intends to change a designation for an athletic team or sport.

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.”¹ The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) 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.”²

¹ Pope Francis, [Address to the Italian Tennis Federation](#), Rome (May 8, 2015)

² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), [U.S. Bishop Chairmen Letter to Congress in Support Protection of Women’s and Girls’ Sports](#) (October 27, 2020)

The USCCB has noted the importance of prizing the unique and complimentary gifts of men and women within the context of family.

By erasing the beautiful differences and complementary relationship between man and woman, we ignore the glory of God's creation and harm the human family, the first building block of society. Our sex, whether we are male or female, is part of God's plan for creation and for our lives. As Pope Francis has taught with such sensitivity, to live in the truth with God's intended gifts in our lives requires that we receive our bodily and sexual identity with gratitude from our Creator. No one can find true happiness by pursuing a path that is contrary to God's plan.

Every human person is made in the image and likeness of God and, without exception, must be treated with dignity, compassion, and respect. Protecting our neighbors from unjust discrimination does not require redefining human nature.³

As Pope Francis wrote, "The 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."⁴

Each person has been given a natural body that is either a male or female. We need, in the words of Pope Francis, "to rediscover the beauty of the creative design that also inscribes the image of God in the alliance between man and woman."⁵

By acknowledging "sex" as assigned or determined at birth by a physician and reflected on the birth certificate, these bills seek to maintain and uphold the value that both men and women bring to athletics.

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference therefore urges you to support AB 195, AB 196, SB 322, and SB 323.

Thank you for your time today.

³ USCCB, [*President of U.S. Bishops' Conference Issues Statement on Supreme Court Decision on Legal Definition of "Sex" in Civil Rights Law*](#) (June 15, 2020)

⁴ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, n. 155 (2015)

⁵ Pope Francis, [*General Audience*](#), (April 15, 2015)