



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Representative David Murphy, Chair  
Members, Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

FROM: David Earleywine, Associate Director for Education

DATE: March 11, 2025

RE: Support for Assembly Bill 102, Designating University of Wisconsin School Sports by Sex

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The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony in support of Assembly Bill 102.

This bill requires each University of Wisconsin institution and technical college that operates that any intercollegiate or club sports to designate the athletic team or sport based on the sex of the participating students. 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 student from participating on an athletic team or in an athletic sport designed for females. The bill requires educational institutions to prohibit a male student from using a locker room designated for females.

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 every person is born biologically and genetically either male or female. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops explained that “Consistent with the Catholic Church’s clear teaching on the equality of men and women, we reaffirm that, in education and in sports as elsewhere, policies must uphold human dignity. This includes equal treatment between women and men and affirmation of the goodness of a person’s body, which is genetically and biologically female or male.”<sup>1</sup>

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.”<sup>2</sup>

The Church recognizes that sports can impact the whole human person. As Pope Francis has said, “The Church is interested in sport because the person is at her heart, the whole person, and she recognizes that

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<sup>1</sup> USCCB, *Press Release* (Feb. 6, 2025), <https://www.usccb.org/news/2025/we-welcome-presidents-executive-order-protects-opportunities-women-and-girls-compete>

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life*, (June 25, 2018), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/june/documents/papa-francesco\\_20180625\\_accademia-provita.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/june/documents/papa-francesco_20180625_accademia-provita.html)

sports activity affects the formation, relations and spirituality of a person.”<sup>3</sup> Recently, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) echoed this sentiment, stating that “[a]thletics not only provide valuable educational opportunities, fostering discipline, teamwork, and personal growth, but they also serve as a celebration of the human body as a gift from God.”<sup>4</sup>

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. As the USCCB wrote,

In 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.<sup>5</sup>

The USCCB also emphasized that “In further recognition of the inherent dignity of the human person, the Church stands firmly against all unjust discrimination, including against those who experience gender discordance, who are equally loved by God. Students who experience gender dysphoria bear the full measure of human dignity, and they therefore must be treated with kindness and respect. Similar to their peers, those students must be assured the right to participate in or try out for co-educational activities in accord with their biological sex.”<sup>6</sup>

We know that some will feel hurt by this legislation. Even as we support this bill and urge its passage, we ask everyone to treat one another with charity and dignity. How do we accomplish this? First, we must will the good of the other. To love like Christ means to desire the good of the individuals in our lives: walking with them, listening to them with empathy, and accompanying them with compassion and truth. Second, we must avoid the extremes. We must not dogmatically assert that biological sex is the end of the conversation, while ignoring the pain of the person in front of us; nor must we reject biological reality in the false hope of relieving pain.<sup>7</sup> Finally, we must uphold the truth. We must both affirm God-given biological sex and condemn unjust discrimination in all its forms. True compassion knows no other way.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Address to Italian Tennis Federation* (May 8, 2015), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/may/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150508\\_federazione-italiana-tennis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/may/documents/papa-francesco_20150508_federazione-italiana-tennis.html); see also: Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, *Giving the Best of Yourself: A Document on the Christian perspective on Sport and the Human Person* (June 1, 2018), <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/01/180601b.html>

<sup>4</sup> USCCB, *supra* note 1.

<sup>5</sup> USCCB, *Letter to Congress* (Oct. 27, 2020), <https://www.usccb.org/resources/Letter-in-Support-of-the-Protection-of-Women-and-Girls-in-Sports-Act.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> Archbishop Paul S. Coakley, *On the Unity of the Body and Soul: Accompanying Those Experiencing Gender Dysphoria* (Apr. 30, 2023), [https://archokc.org/documents/2023/5/On%20the%20Unity%20of%20the%20Body%20and%20Soul\\_Archbishop%20Paul%20Coakley\\_Pastoral%20Letter\\_English\\_2023-2.pdf](https://archokc.org/documents/2023/5/On%20the%20Unity%20of%20the%20Body%20and%20Soul_Archbishop%20Paul%20Coakley_Pastoral%20Letter_English_2023-2.pdf)