Help High Schools Comply with Title IX

May 27, 2010

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the nearly 100,000 bipartisan members and donors of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I urge you to cosponsor the bipartisan High School Sports Information Collection Act (S. 471), introduced by Senators Snowe (R-ME) and Murray (D-WA). This legislation would require that high schools report basic data on the number of female and male students participating in their athletic programs and the expenditures made for their sports teams. It is important to note that schools already collect the data required under this legislation. However, currently this data is not publicly available. This bill would make this baseline Title IX information available to the public. Now is the time to help high schools better comply with Title IX.

The importance of reporting data related to athletics gets at the heart of Title IX enforcement. A record number of women are now actively participating in collegiate sports in large part due to the requirements of accountability provided under the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act of 1994, which requires colleges and universities to account for how their athletics opportunities, resources, and dollars were allocated among male and female athletes. This reporting requirement accounts, in large part, for the narrowing of the athletics gap at the college level, proving that sunshine can be the best of disinfectants. While women’s athletics continue to lag behind men both in opportunities to participate and in dollars spent, women’s college athletic participation has increased by 574 percent since 1972, proving that interest follows opportunity.¹

It has been a significant drawback to Title IX enforcement that no such accountability requirement exists at the high school level. While colleges must be transparent about their athletic opportunity and funding, high schools are not required to report opportunity and funding statistics to any higher authority. As a result, high school girls are being deprived of the critical opportunity to play sports. In fact, while girls comprise half of the high school population, they receive only 41 percent of all athletic participation opportunities – 1.3 million fewer participation opportunities than male high school athletes.² Statistics have shown that girls thrive when they participate in sports and are less likely to get pregnant, drop out of school, do drugs, smoke, or develop mental illness.³

In addition, increasing children’s physical activity can help combat childhood obesity, which is at an all-time high. Over the past three decades, childhood obesity rates in the U.S. have tripled, and today, one in three American children are overweight or obese.⁴ The issue is receiving even more attention after the recent creation of the Presidential Task Force on Childhood Obesity and Let’s Move program. The High School Sports Information Collection Act could aid in decreasing childhood obesity by helping to ensure that schools are providing all their students with equal opportunities to benefit from school sports programs. The New York Times recently highlighted research that found that the “increase in girls’ athletic participation caused by Title IX was associated with a 7 percent lower risk of obesity 20 to 25 years later, when women were in their late 30s and early 40s.” The study notes that while a 7 percent decline in obesity is modest, “no other public health program can claim similar success.”⁵ Simply put, properly enforcing Title IX and increasing children’s physical activity can lower obesity risks even into adulthood.

The benefits girls receive from participating in sports can lead to success in all aspects of life. By cosponsoring the High School Sports Information Collection Act (S. 471), you would be taking the first step to ensure that future generations of girls will be afforded the opportunities that all children
deserve. I urge you to contact Tamarie Macon (Tamarie_Macon@Snowe.Senate.Gov, 202-224-5344) in Sen. Snowe’s office to cosponsor the legislation. If you have any further questions, feel free to contact me at 202-785-7720, or Tracy Sherman, government relations manager, at 202-785-7730. Cosponsorship and votes associated with these issues may be included in the AAUW Action Fund Congressional Voting Record for the 111th Congress.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Maatz
Director of Public Policy and Government Relations

---


5 Ibid.