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To: Chairperson Hansen and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee
From: Anahí Salazar, Policy Coordinator for Voices for Children in Nebraska
RE: Opposition for LB 575, adopt the Sports and Spaces Act.

Every child deserves to feel welcomed and supported for who they are. Schools and sports teams should strive to create a welcoming environment for all students regardless of race, religion, gender identity or other personal characteristics or circumstances. Children and young people in Nebraska should be able to focus on things that make them live happier lives. Participating in sports not only increases endorphins but it can also create comradery amongst peers. Voices for Children opposes LB 575 because it would harm transgendered youth by prohibiting them from participating in sports teams and spaces like locker rooms associated with their gender.

LB 575 explicitly excludes transgendered youth from participating in a sports team associated with their gender, in an attempt to erase their gender identity. LB 575 tries to remove trans youth from sports and spaces they would feel most comfortable in, not only causing harm to the young person's mental health but their overall wellbeing. More than 2 in 3 transgender and nonbinary youth reported symptoms of major depressive disorder.¹ Creating policies that discriminate against transgendered and nonbinary athletes will not only divorce them from pro-social, healthy activities, but cause further mental health disruption through feelings of alienation and shame.

According to research from the Trevor Project, an organization whose mission it is to end suicide among the LGBTQ community, sports can play an important role in lowering depression among LGBTQ youth.² Participation in sports activities within the LGBTQ community can be minimal, not because young people are not interested but because they fear hearing negative comments about the LGBTQ community, not being allowed to play with their associated gender, being discriminated against and being harassed from both peers and coaches.³

Policies, practices, and care that accept and affirm young people's gender identities can help transgender youth thrive. Nebraska sports, schools and communities should be focusing on ways to make spaces more inclusive and accessible to every person. Coaches and school leaders should be learning how to make their spaces more welcoming for LGBTQ students and athletes. Every athlete should be able to participate side by side with their peers.

For all these reasons, Voices for Children in Nebraska opposes LB 574 and would respectfully urge the committee to not advance it. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ "The Trevor Project National Survey." *Www.thetrevorproject.org*, www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/?section=SuicideMentalHealth.

² "LGBTQ Youth Sports Participation." *The Trevor Project*, www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/lgbtq-youth-sports-participation-2/.

³ "LGBTQ Youth Sports Participation." *The Trevor Project*, www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/lgbtq-youth-sports-participation-2/.

