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Legislative District 11
Baltimore County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children, Youth,
and Families

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake
and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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The Senate of Maryland ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY OF SHELLY HETTLEMAN

SB 951 – Inclusive Athletic Attire Act

This bill seeks to codify the right of our student athletes to modify their athletic uniforms to comply with requirements or preferences that align with their religious or cultural practices. Students should never have to choose between their faith and participating in sports. An athlete who wishes to honor their faith tradition by wearing a turban, a hijab, or by wearing long sleeves under a jersey should not be penalized, ostracized or otherwise excluded from participating.

SB951 will codify into State law the right for secondary school, community college, and college and university athletes in public institutions to wear clothing or head coverings that are worn for religious reasons, including a including a hijab, Sikh turban, or long undergarments for modesty, without requiring any prior approval.

As you will hear from our panelists and written testimony, creating these barriers can cause a student athlete to feel demoralized or stigmatized and has even resulted in players being completely barred from participating.

Unfortunately, many of the students who were able to testify in the House could not take time off of school to be with us today, but I would like to point you to the written testimony of a Montgomery County high school student named Je’Nan Hayes who was benched during a basketball game in 2017 because she lacked “documented evidence” that she was required to wear her hijab for religious reasons. The Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association issued a memo that granted an exception to the National Federation of High School Association’s uniform standards. The memo states that *“Any participant may wear a head covering, wrap, or other required religious garment which is not abrasive, hard, or dangerous to any player/others, and is attached in such a way that it is unlikely to come off during play.”*

We are concerned that if your rights can be granted in a memo, they can be taken away. Memos can be subject to change depending on fluid factors, such as who is in leadership. We don’t want these rights subject to political wind shifts. This bill, modeled after 2017 legislation from Illinois, creates an extra layer of security to protect the civil rights of religious minorities.

In recognizing the vital role that athletics plays in building skills in leadership and fostering a sense of teamwork and community we should be supporting young people’s desire to play, not isolating them because of their beliefs. According to 2020 Census data, Maryland’s demographic makeup is considered to be the most racially and

ethnically diverse on the East Coast. As such, it is in our best interest to ensure that ALL our students have opportunities, not obstacles, to get in the game.

No student athlete should ever have to choose between their religious beliefs and the sports they love. For these reasons, I ask for your support of SB951. Thank you.

¹United States Census Bureau., (2020) “Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the United States: 2010 Census and 2020 Census”. Retrieved from:
<https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/racial-and-ethnic-diversity-in-the-united-states-2010-and-2020-census.html>

