

March 15, 2022

Honorable Senator Paul Pinsky
Chair, Senate Committee on Education, Health & Environment
Miller Senate Office Building, Room 2 West
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB951 Inclusive Athletic Attire Act

Dear Chair Pinsky and Education, Health & Environment Committee Members:

I feel a great sense of honor to be an outlet for change and testify support of bill SB951. Thank you to the respected persons who have introduced this legislation in response to my personal experience and the countless untold stories of people who have faced unfairness in the light of sports. Looking back at the trials I encountered while being on the varsity basketball team at Watkins Mill High school, the first of many challenges began because I wore long-sleeve shirts under my jersey. The referees withheld me from playing due to my undershirt not modifying the official basketball uniform. As a woman, who is Muslim and observes the hijab, conforming my modesty to fit into archaic rulings is something that is not up for negotiation. On many occasions, I observed that some referees granted other players, especially boys who played basketball, to wear opposite color undershirts and allowed clearance to participate in the sport. I would watch from the sidelines and often feel discriminated against. Why did other basketball players get a pass for doing the same thing I do every day to uphold the values of my religious beliefs?

In my 11 years of wearing hijab, I have been called a Thesaurus of nicknames and a receiver of offensive jokes, but never considered the potential to experience a ruling from a sport that would make me authenticate my sincerity to my faith. I had previously played in 24 basketballs tournaments at my school during the season, and on March 3, 2017, I was denied to right to play the sport I had worked countless hours on. My team had lost the regional final against Oxon Hill High School. After losing, my coach Donita Adams pulled me aside and explained my denial for playing time was the absence of official documentation explaining my reason for hijab. Here is the reason, I am Muslim. Wearing a hijab is a part of my uniform that God and God alone can rule on. I should not be a target for simply practicing what I believe is per my faith. A need for documentation about wearing a hijab in a sport was never brought to my attention when I tried out for the team- and it certainly was never discussed with me by the referee before the regional final. Nonetheless, I am somewhat grateful to the Oxon Hill referee who chose to enforce that archaic ruling on that day. Because of rejection, I have gained many opportunities to tell my story, impact change, and increase community support.

By sharing my story, I am here today speaking my truth and refusing to lay down in the face of injustice. I am here today because I refuse to hear another story of a Muslim and other religious party who observe head coverings denied the right to play a sport they love. Thank you for

allowing me the privilege of this written testimony; thank you for this opportunity to testify. I respectfully urge your vote in favor of bill SB951.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Je'Nan Hayes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

Je'Nan Hayes
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