

Witness Testimony HB 1122
Jennifer Lambert

As a homeschool mom of five, I want to offer my full support for House Bill 1122 Public Schools - Home School Students - Extracurricular Activities (Right to Play Act of 2022) going before the committee on March 9. I am extremely excited about this bill, as it is way past due for the children of our state.

I have been homeschooling my children since my oldest daughter was in third grade. We are 14 years into homeschooling with 14 more to go. My kids are 4, 6, 9, 12, and 21. All of my children are athletic, and have played sports since they could walk. My 21-year-old daughter has been a baton twirler since age three and has recently retired. She ended her twirling career as a world and national champion and feature twirler for three seasons at University of Maryland. Her sport afforded her numerous opportunities, travel, life lessons, and relationships with friends, competitors, and coaches. Another bonus to her sport is that the baton twirling world exists outside of any school, as many artistic sports do. My other children play football, baseball, softball, and basketball and play in area rec and club leagues.

I used to believe that because I homeschool my children, they do not have the right to participate in public school sports or extracurricular activities; that we homeschool for a reason, and participation would somehow be hypocritical. That is, until I realized my now 12-year-old son will age out of youth football at 14. I began to reflect and talk to other homeschool moms about this. I came to several conclusions that were instrumental in changing my perspective.

- Another homeschool mom pointed out that "extracurricular" is just that, EXTRA-curricular. Sports, music, and drama, for example, are extras no matter how or where a child is educated.
- My son is a talented athlete and truly has the potential for college athletics and beyond. Many sports can be played in private clubs and youth organizations throughout high school age, but some cannot – football is one of them. It is also important to note that although some sports may be offered outside of public school, the level of competitiveness is often subpar for those who excel.
- The homeschool community has seen an influx of growth over the last two years, and it seems it will continue to grow for many reasons. I find it hard to believe that parents and children are willing to completely give up on extracurricular activities and sports because they wish to homeschool. I also do not think that parents are ready and willing to enroll their children in public school for the sole purpose of sports. There needs to be a happy medium.
- As tax paying citizens contributing financially to the public school system, shouldn't our children have the opportunity to participate in activities outside the scope of homeschooling? Homeschoolers are not the enemy. We, as

homeschool parents, seek the same end goal as public school parents – to have well-rounded, educated children – it simply just looks different, and the reasons to homeschool are as many as there are homeschool families.

- Sports, and extracurricular activities are not partisan issues. They are important activities that not only contribute to the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of all children, but they also offer relationships, life lessons and skills, and lasting childhood memories. The homeschooling community is one of great diversity, and I reiterate that the reasons to educate kids at home are vast.

Currently, thirty-six states have Tebow Laws, and on February 10, 2022, the House of Delegates in our neighboring state of Virginia passed HB 511 which will allow homeschoolers to play sports in public schools if the bill also passes in the Senate.

This year, my 12-year-old son, Caleb, and his football team were the SMYAC 11U Champions and the 11U Thanksgiving Bowl Champions in Gatlinburg. His current 12U baseball team is heading to the Cal Ripken Major/70 World Series in Branson, MO this summer. My husband and I want to see him go as far as he can as long as he wants to and as long as he does his part athletically and educationally. He can only do this if the opportunity is there.

Talent exists in the homeschool community. Our children are hoping for the opportunity and resources to develop, utilize, and contribute their skills. Education is only a piece of a child's overall experience at this age – they should not be denied a chance to further that experience solely on how that education happens.

Thank you for your time.

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