

# The Columbus Dispatch

## POLITICS

# Poll: Majority of Ohioans oppose letting transgender girls play on female sports teams

*LGTBQ groups say the poll's results show a need for more education about what it means to be a transgender athlete and the policies already in place.*



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Most Ohioans don't want transgender girls playing on female sports teams in schools or children attending drag performances, according to a Suffolk University/USA TODAY Network poll.

Seventy percent told pollsters they disagree with letting transgender girls who use hormones play on female teams. Support for these athletes was at 21% with 9% saying they remain undecided.

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When it came to drag shows, 66% of Ohioans surveyed between July 9 and 12 wanted all performances restricted to those 18 years of age or older. About 30% disagreed and 4% were undecided.

## What the data says

Ohio's opposition to transgender athletes mirrors national polling on the issue. A Gallup poll conducted in June found that 70% of Americans also believe student-athletes should

only compete on teams that conform with their birth gender.

"It's an issue of fairness," state Rep. Jean Schmidt, R-Loveland, said. "I think people from both parties see that. It's just common sense. We are different. We're made different."

**Poll:** 58% of likely Ohio voters back proposal to enshrine abortion access in constitution

Republicans overwhelmingly agreed with Schmidt, but Ohio Democrats were more divided. They split almost down the middle with 45% supporting transgender athletes and 40% opposing.

"On the ground, this is what people are talking about," state Rep. Josh Williams, R-Sylvania, said. "When we go into districts and we are talking to voters at the doors, overwhelmingly we hear it should not be permitted."

LGBTQ groups say the poll results show a need for more education about what it means to be a transgender athlete and the policies already in place.

"I think the idea people oppose is someone could show up and just pick another team. That's not how our policy works," Equality Ohio Policy Director Maria Bruno said. "I think most people you talk to and have longer conversations with, want to know more about the science and safety. And when you do that, people are really inclusive."

The Ohio High School Athletic Association requires transgender girls to be on hormone therapy and submit regular blood tests that confirm their testosterone levels are below a certain amount.

Democratic voters were also split on whether drag performances should be restricted to 18 or older. About 66% of Ohioans said yes, but Democrats were divided 45% yes to 54% no.

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Bruno, again, attributed that to a lack of "accurate information" about drag culture and the different types of performances/events that exist.

"We've seen people manipulate the conversation in a way that's not true," Bruno said.

She compared it to the misinformation campaigns against gay marriage. Support for same-sex marriage has risen steadily since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized it nationwide in 2015. About 71% of Americans say they support gay marriage, according to another recent separate Gallup poll.

The only LGBTQ issue with majority support in the Suffolk University/USA TODAY Network Ohio poll was about gay characters in books. Fifty-five percent of Ohioans said school libraries should offer books with gay characters.

## What this means for legislation?

Schmidt, a competitive distance runner herself, has repeatedly co-sponsored legislation in the Ohio House that would ban transgender girls from playing on female sports teams and said this survey further confirms her belief that it's the right decision.

A version of this legislation passed the Ohio House in June as part of a package of changes for transgender minors. House Bill 68 would also restrict the kinds of medical care (hormones, puberty blockers) that minors could access.

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The bill is now awaiting assignment to a committee in the Ohio Senate.

When it comes to the recently introduced bill to restrict where drag performances can occur, Democrats say everyone in the statehouse wants to protect children from sexually explicit content.

"What we see in Ohio are extreme bills that criminalize someone for showing a child the play *Mrs. Doubtfire* or allowing a community production of *Mulan*," Rep. Beth Liston, D-Dublin, said. "These laws require people to dress in a specific way based on their expected genitals. How long before it is illegal for women to wear pants?"

*Anna Staver is a reporter for the USA TODAY Network Ohio Bureau, which serves the Columbus Dispatch, Cincinnati Enquirer, Akron Beacon Journal and 18 other affiliated*

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