

Do Pass Testimony of Susan Draper, Citizen of North Dakota on HB 1491

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide information regarding HB 1491. I am Kambree Draper a student athlete that this “rule” has affected personally, and I am testifying to express my strong DO PASS on House Bill 1491. I have been affected by this rule along with numerous other athletes in ND.

Let me tell you tell my story. I as a 7th grader in 2020 took WDA’s in girls high school swimming for Williston, ND. The next year as an 8th grader I was excited to compete at the high school level again, until we found out that WHS had hired a coach that had sent naked photos to a student athlete. I expressed my uncomfortable feelings with my parents about swimming for a coach that had done such an act. My parents talked with numerous school administrators, the head coach and were assured by all of them that this was a one-time incident and was an accident and would not happen again, even though they expressed how uncomfortable I was with the situation. My parents and I didn’t feel comfortable with the current situation, so we chose not to compete for WHS while she was on staff. This assistant coach had no swimming experience, so even if the coach didn’t do the photo thing, would she really have anything to say about how I was swimming or if I developed a bad habit? This coach stayed on staff through the 2022 girls swimming season. So, at this point I had not swum high school since being a 7th grader.

Fast forward to 2024 season, my mom and I have now moved to Bismarck, ND and begin the process of registering me for high school, I am now in my junior year, and thought I might want to swim at high school. I need to disclose that my dad stayed in Williston, ND for work. Imagine my surprise to find out I would not be eligible to participate as a varsity level athlete due to us not being “locked and loaded” when we moved. This is a term the NDHSSA uses for athletes, that have transferred into a new district. Essentially, if both parents don’t move together, then the student is forced to sit out a year of ALL sports. Let me remind the committee, I have not swam high school since my 7th grade year. I am in my junior year of high school, in a new town, and a new school. Yes, was it my parents’ choice to move, yes, but now in addition to worrying about school, fitting in, making new friends, I can’t swim at the top level that I have worked so hard to be at, and there is this underlining current that I have done something wrong.

Another swimmer from Fargo, ND had a similar incident but transferred from home schooling to public school without moving addresses. This athlete also had to sit out her sophomore year of swimming. Her situation was a little bit different though, she got to swim in the fastest heat during swim meets if she was seeded that way, even though she didn’t get to score for her team. Bismarck and the NDHSA took it to a whole another level with me as I was not allowed to even swim in the fastest heat, but had to swim in the 3rd or 4th heat. I swam against kids that were not at my level and ended up lapping some of the other athletes. Can you tell me how good this is mentally for the other athletes, or for me? The coaches from the other teams would even prepare their swimmers, had to compete against me.

There were points during all of this that I honestly wanted to quit; quit a sport that I love because of adult politics. I was told I was treated differently because I am a high-profile athlete. How does the NDHSA determine who a high-profile athlete is and who is not. I spend hours in the pool and gym as do other athletes just to have it taken because adults are playing politics and assume someone may be better than someone else.

Just so all of you know, I did get to swim varsity this year, I only missed approximately 6 meets at Varsity level. God provided my dad a new job in Bismarck, so my situation worked out.

But it made me want to fight for other athletes that don't have the same situation, that don't have parents that can move or pay two mortgages, to full fill their child's dream of swimming at a high level. I get that there are instances where recruiting could happen, but in the bill, it specifically says that recruitment would need to be proven and addresses it. Did this committee know most high school sports only last 13 weeks; 13 weeks that could change an athlete's desire to compete in competition, 13 weeks for an athlete to make "new" friends that they typically would not hang around, 13 weeks to ponder is all of this worth it when in the end, an adults decision to move made it so I can't compete at the level I have worked so hard to be at.

Again, I would ask that this committee render a do pass on this bill and take the politics out of our high school sports here in ND.

Sincerely,

Kambree Draper

Student Athlete

Legacy High School