

March 9, 2023

RE: Support Letter for SB 2229

Chairman Longmuir and Members of the House Political Subdivisions Committee,

If you will, please picture a ten-year-old girl wearing her yellow winter coat, frustrated, and completely exhausted from repeatedly falling on the ice after trying to slide out further and further from the hack. The 42 lb rock weighs almost as much as she does, but her coach gives her feedback to improve her form after every fall, so she keeps going. She collects her reward of a PB&J after youth league and her dad stops by the John Deere implement on the way home. She fills a cup with fountain pop while dad gets a part at the counter. It's almost a weekly tradition. They drive the 18 miles back home.

Imagine her five years later with a newly printed license driving those same roads to women's league. There's cheese-wiz and green olive topped bun halves riding in the back seat since it's her team's turn to bring food. Their skip who brought her mom in to try curling 20 years ago when she was new to town leads them to a championship. The girl cleans the skip's rocks for her so she doesn't have to crouch down for so long with an aching knee. It feels helpful. A couple years later the girl is accepted among even the men of the club and allowed to join their league night to get more ice time. A learning experience to be sure. She manages to convince her dad to play with her team of men 40 years her senior. Learning while sliding in jeans proves difficult, but athletic pants are a "no-go" for dad in public.

In those league nights she learns the ins and outs of community, volunteering, and dedication. She eventually must decide whether to keep cheerleading for basketball or to start curling competitively since the seasons overlap. She makes the best decision of her life. From there she travels to Alaska, Washington, Wisconsin, and Minnesota to compete for junior national titles. Each year her team improves, and they finally start earning medals, validating years of work.

Cue college at the state's largest university. It's fall and she's struggling to make friends since the only ones she's ever been close with came as a package deal with the kindergarten classroom. The sharp move to a town full of unrecognizable people and engineering coursework that never got easy gave her anxiety and her grades started slipping away from the A's she'd known in high school. November hits, and she signs up for league at a new curling club. It smells faintly familiar, but not quite like the one back home. The people are the same though. Welcoming, overly nice, and everyone speaks the same language of the sport. Her grades start improving as the semester goes on.

Individuals she has competed against for years become teammates and close friends. One particularly competitive individual whose parents learned how to curl at the opposite end of the state 20 years ago becomes her boyfriend. Then her fiancé. Then husband.

Together they participate in various men's and women's national championships apart as well as together in mixed curling. He takes a job managing the curling club for a couple of years and develops a knack for ice-making. They win nationals and go to the world mixed championships one year. He qualifies for the Olympic Trials. She sits with some family in the stands but has a hard time staying in one seat. It's more fun to roam around the arena and catch up with the families of past teammates, debate strategy calls with other curlers, and watch the kids make signs in the lobby.

If you're still with me so far, please picture present day, 2023. The LLC her and her husband have selling curling supplies at club pop-ups across the state does well enough to buy more inventory and equipment, but not well enough to draw from yet. It's enjoyable though. She's on the board of the same club she was welcomed into thirteen years ago, and frequently volunteers there. Both her and her husband coach junior teams that have a hunger for improving, are kind-hearted to the core, and have the air of "curling lifers". The junior boy's team is just as passionate on the ice as her husband, and they are beginning to learn how to prep ice. The junior girl's team has no trouble making connections from all over the state and is developing the innate sense of community and sportsmanship of curling in their women's league. They've already brought food this year and they started league playoffs this week.

As you read this today, March 9th, 2023, I have a suitcase in my car at work here in Fargo packed with everything I need to go curl for the weekend up in Grafton. A team dropped out of their spring bonspiel yesterday, and I was asked to help put together a team to round out the bracket. We've got the 7:30 PM draw tonight and I'll be playing with a competitive skip I secretly feared growing up and two newer curlers from another small town that wanted to play but were short-handed. I'm excited to go back and play at "home" and stay at my folks' place in Hoople.

The amazing woman who ran my youth league and coached me early on in my career is playing on another team, and I'm hoping we meet up somewhere on the ice. Her husband who skipped my dad, my dentist, and myself in men's league will probably pop in to watch for a bit if he hasn't already taken off for ice fishing this weekend. Grafton's younger ice guy has probably already talked on the phone with my husband about how the ice is behaving and troubleshooting quirks before everyone shows up. The older one will likely give me a short, gruff welcome and act more busy than he is, but I'll always remember him as the adventurous traveler that let me interview him for my English class and the only man I know that would pull up to a high school graduation party, pull a tuba out of his pickup bed, and play a quick tune for the grad before driving off.

Curling is full of the best people I know and I'm glad that most of us are all in it together for life in one way or another. Without curling and our ND curlers in particular, I don't know who or where I would be. Many others across the state can say the same. Below are some further examples of why I believe curling is a great fit to be our state sport.

- ND produces the top ice makers in the US that travel all over the country for the United States Curling Association (USCA) to make championship level curling ice. Their knowledge all stems from a couple of farmers from Devil's Lake and Grand Forks that couldn't let an odd spot in the ice go uncorrected and had to tinker with it to perfection. Their job of ice making mirrors their roots in that it takes a lot of love and time without much thanks. It is a blend of art, science, and secretive knowledge that is only earned from their predecessors through trust and hard work.
- Our junior athletes consistently rank among the top in the nation. Of the ten individuals representing Team USA at the Junior World Championships in Germany last week, three of them were from North Dakota. These individuals from Fargo and Edmore represented our state well and truly reflect the humility, comradery, and stick-to-it-ness of all our constituents.
- The NDSU curling club dominated the collegiate ranks its first year entering the field so much so that the entire collegiate curling system was redrawn with new rules to keep competition closer. The score of the NDSU v. Yale semi final was 11-1. They came home with the championship.

- Curling clubs were popular social environments for a long time in our state. Particularly in smaller towns where farming kept folks busy in the off-season. Since the 70's many of those small clubs have hit hard times or had plant failures that were too costly to repair. Cavalier, Edmore, Park River, Petersburg, and Langdon are just a handful of towns that had clubs that were key to their communities at one point. A new generation of passionate curlers has come along in the past few years and they're reviving the clubs they grew up in to keep them going.
 - Grafton - *Remodeled ice and viewing areas, purchased new rocks, and fixed ceiling.*
 - Drayton - *Widened building, updated ice area, and purchased a new plant that can hold ice year-round. They now hold ice for a bonspiel in the middle of summer and had a "rain league" last summer to play when the fields were too wet.*
 - Grand Forks - *Rebuilt their club from the ground up with their members' own hands.*
 - Bismarck – *Overhauled their club space downstairs to accommodate more members.*
 - Devil's Lake – *Installed a new plant after a recent failure.*
 - Minot – *Remodeled their upstairs viewing area.*
 - Fargo – *Installed a new camera system to stream all games online on YouTube.*
 - Williston – *Remodeled their upstairs and downstairs viewing areas.*
- Volunteers from across the state helped to host the Men's World Championships at the Ralph in 2008, but countless more have hosted and will host national, state, and local competitions from Bisbee to Bismarck bringing in folks from across the country and world to experience what North Dakota has to offer and who its residents are.

Finally, I'd like to quote page one of the 2022 USA Rules of Curling & Competition handbook,

"Curlers play to win, but never to humble their opponents. A true curler never attempts to distract opponents, nor to prevent them from playing their best, and would prefer to lose rather than to win unfairly. Curlers never knowingly break a rule of the game, nor disrespect any of its traditions. Should they become aware that this has been done inadvertently, they will be the first to divulge the breach."

This is part of the USCA's definition of the spirit of curling. It reiterates that like most North Dakotans I know we work for and earn what we deserve humbly. We respect others, including our adversaries, and wish the best for them. We're honest to – not a fault, but to the greater good and the moral decisions that will propel everyone forward. We remember our heritage and who it makes us.

As much as I love watching the Class B Tournament (I acknowledge that it did put our school on the map in '94), I'd argue that the sport of curling and what it entails at its core most closely represents our state and its values. Dedication, community, perseverance, humility, and tradition. These attributes will always be found in curlers and ND constituents both on and off the ice with or without the passing of this bill, but it would be a declaration all of us could carry with pride if it does pass. Coming from a place of sincerity and genuine pride in our sport and our state, I strongly encourage this committee to approve this bill that would reflect the true essence of North Dakota and its constituents. Thank you for your time and consideration during this busy session.

Good Curling,

Rachel Workin
Fargo, ND