Written Testimony of Megan A. Mooney, Ph.D.
For the Senate Committee on State Affairs
March 26, 2021

Chair Hughes and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Megan Mooney and my pronouns are she, her, and hers. I am submitting my written testimony in opposition to SB 29.

I am a Licensed Psychologist in private practice in Houston. I serve primarily children, adolescents, and families. In particular, I specialize in treating youth and families who have been exposed to traumatic events. I am an affiliate member of the SAMHSA-funded National Child Traumatic Stress Network. I serve as a Clinical Assistant Professor with the Baylor College of Medicine Menninger Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, and an Adjunct Assistant Professor with the University of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston's Louis A. Faillace, MD Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences. I am also the recent Past President of the Texas Psychological Association. This is my testimony submitted on my own behalf as an individual and not representing these organizations.

I have served children and families for over 13 years as a licensed psychologist in Texas. Throughout this time as well as the decade of education and training I received prior to my licensure, I have had the honor and privilege to work with families who seek my help in combatting depression, suicidality, anxiety, posttraumatic stress, academic struggles, family conflicts, and countless other emotional and behavioral problems. My work focuses not just on decreasing "symptoms" or "problems" but also in building and enhancing strengths. One area of strength for which I always assess and encourage participation is school sports. Research demonstrates that participation in team sports is associated with better youth and adult mental health outcomes such as lower levels of depression, lower risk of suicide, and higher self-esteem (Boone, & Leadbeater, 2006; Easterlin, Chung, Leng, & Dudovitz, 2019; Taliaferro, Rienzo, Pigg, Miller, & Dodd, 2009).

Transgender young people already experience extraordinary rates of bullying, harassment, and violence, with much of this taking place on high school campuses. For example, the GLSEN 2019 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw, Clark, Truong, & Zongrone, 2020) found that 87.4% of LGBTQ+ students have heard negative remarks about transgender people (e.g., "tranny" or "he/she"). Emerging research suggests that anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation and attempts in transgender youth as well as adults are likely a consequence of the rejection, trauma, and discrimination that are based on their gender identity/expression. Multiple studies suggest that over 40% of transgender youth attempt suicide at some point in their lifetime, largely due to these experiences. This is in stark contrast to the 4% rate of attempts that is the average for their peers. (Mustanski, Garofalo, & Emerson 2010; Nock, et al., 2013; CDC YRBS Data, 2017). Thankfully, we also know that transgender individuals in welcoming environments have generally healthy psychological functioning (e.g. Olson, Durwood, DeMeules & McLaughlin, 2016; Pariseau, Chevalier, Long, Clapham, Edwards-Leeper, & Tishelman, 2019).

There is no evidence to suggest that inclusive school policies regarding participation in athletics harms cisgender girls or decreases their participation in sports. In fact, inclusive school policies have demonstrated positive impacts on the mental health and well-being of transgender girls by lowering suicide risk and depression as well as school truancy (Kosciw, Clark, Truong, & Zongrone, 2020). Conversely, there is ample evidence to suggest that discriminatory policies harm the health and well-being of trans students. I strongly encourage you each to vote in opposition of SB 29 as this legislation would most assuredly create worsening mental health for our vulnerable transgender youth by limiting their access to positive school-based sports through discriminatory and harmful legislation. This is quite literally a life and death issue.