



**Testimony Before the House of Homeland Security Committee  
Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Accountability**

**Riley Gaines  
Spokeswoman, Independent Women's Forum**

**Washington, D.C.  
May 16, 2023**

Thank you Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Ivey, and members of the Committee for inviting me to speak to you today. My name is Riley Gaines. I am a 12-time All-American Swimmer from the University of Kentucky. Competing in the women's division of the 2022 NCAA Championships, I and my fellow female swimmers were required to compete and share the locker room with Lia Thomas, a biological male who competed on the men's team at University of Pennsylvania as Will Thomas the three years prior. In the 200-yard NCAA women's final I tied Thomas. Despite going the exact same time down to the hundredth of a second, the NCAA gave Thomas the trophy as they explained this was necessary for "photo purposes" and told me I had to go home empty handed.

At our National Championships, I looked around and wondered why no one was standing up for me and all the other women in the pool and in the locker room. As I talked to my teammates and competitors at the NCAA Championships, I discovered that the overwhelming majority of the girls shared extreme discomfort being forced to strip down in front of a male who was intact with and exposing male genitalia in the same room. After seeing how this affected every girl at that meet, I decided I would stand up and speak out. I resolved to do everything I could do to ensure that no other girls feel alone in the fight for their right to compete on a level playing field.

I put my plans for dental school on hold after graduation and decided to tell my story. Last December, I joined the nation's most influential women's organization making gains to stand up for women's rights and against discrimination of women in single-sex spaces—Independent Women's Forum (IWF) and its c4 sister organization Independent Women's Voice (IWV). I serve as the organizations' Stand With Women spokeswoman, and have been fortunate to have a bigger platform from which to share my experiences—in the media, before elected officials, among the public, and alongside a bipartisan coalition of organizations and individual athletes driving advocacy efforts to let rule-making bodies like the NCAA and the White House know America won't stand for unjust and discriminatory policies that hinder women's rights. I have spent this past year speaking about the need to keep women's sports female and to safeguard women's privacy, security, and access to a fair playing field. What a year it has been!

My experience certainly did not feel like our privacy and equal opportunities were being protected by administrators who were legally responsible to uphold Title IX. Even worse than the efforts to dismantle Title IX are the efforts to silence and intimidate us through the use of every means available—fear, shame, threats, emotional blackmail, gaslighting—to try to keep us from speaking out against the efforts to deprive women of their rights.

I believe the coerced silencing of women and men by college administrators who will not let us speak freely about injustices now being faced by women in sports is one of the most important free speech issues of our time.

Seeing how universities were not allowing students to truthfully consider all perspectives, I found it necessary to travel to various college campuses to share my experience surrounding the injustices being faced by women in sports and the systemic attempt to erase women as a whole.

However, what I did not know then was how vicious the effort to silence me and other women has become. I would soon learn.

I soon learned that college administrators appear to be using another, even more dangerous technique, reliance on mob intimidation and violence. I have come to believe intimidation and compelled silence is being knowingly enforced through violent means, as college administrators silence free speech by failing to control and prevent mob tactics and mob violence.

On April 6, 2023, I traveled to San Francisco State University to speak to a campus group on the right of women to compete on a level playing field in sports. The school administration was aware of my visit, and the program had been publicized on campus. I was told I would be met by campus police and briefed on a security plan an hour and a half before the event, but the campus police failed to show up to our scheduled meeting.

I went to the building where I was to speak which was on the third-floor of a classroom building. At the time, I did not think about the difficulty of exiting a third-floor room if a mob gained control of the hallways and stairways.

I entered the room which soon began to fill with protestors. Still no campus officers showed like I was told they would. I began my speech and the protestors in the room were generally not disruptive. However, I could hear chanting in the hallway outside the room. I sensed the situation outside might be growing confrontational which was unnerving, but no one provided any guidance to alert me that my safety was at risk. They continuously chanted from outside the room “we fight back.” I began to fear for my safety.

As I ended my presentation, protestors in the room opened the locked doors and a chaotic flood of shouting, angry, protestors forced their way in. The crowd rushed at me, some with fists raised, most shouting, anger contorting many faces around me. Then the lights in the room began flicking on and off in strobe-like fashion and then they went off. The room was filled with the glare of a hundred cell phone flashlights, some being shined in my face. I realized I was at the mercy of the crowd, and I was assaulted.

A woman grabbed me, told me she was with campus police and pulled me toward the door. I did not believe she was actually with the police because she wore no clothes that indicated she was an officer and had a face covering on. I resisted at first, but I recognized I had no choice because I could not have made it out without help. I truly feared for my life.

Once we made it to the hallway, we were met with an even larger mob blocking the stairway exit ultimately forcing us to barricade ourselves into an office along this same hallway. The small room we had found would be my prison for the next three hours. The door to the hallway, the only barrier between me and those who were yelling violent threats, demanding that the door be opened so that they could “handle me themselves.”

In those hours I was held against my will, the mob screamed vengeful, racist, violent things at both myself and the officers. I received no assurance that I would get out of that situation alive. When I needed consoling from the officers because I was so flustered and confused, they told me they could not provide me with that as it was too controversial. I expressed I had been hit, and no one asked me if I was okay or needed medical attention. When I realized I missed my flight back home due to being held hostage, I became visibly upset and told the lieutenant in the room I just wanted to make it home. He responded with “don’t you think we all want to go home?”

After a while some of the protestors began to demand a ransom for my release. They asked for payment and threatened not to safely release me without it. I heard an adult administrator from the university outside the door trying to negotiate my release. They said my appearance on campus was so traumatic, they were “owed something.” They were under the false notion that the university paid me to be there, therefore they only thought it was fair I should pay if I want to leave. The amount of \$10 for each student was suggested.

From inside the room, I heard things being said such as “If she didn’t want the smoke, she shouldn’t have come here”, “you did this to yourself, b\*\*\*\*”, “you come on this campus and think we’re not going to start a riot?”, “let her out so we can handle her”, “we aren’t letting up.” There was even a school reporter there doxxing my information and location on twitter in hopes more protestors would show up.

After hours of being held against my will, officers from the City of San Francisco Police Department finally arrived. These officers were much more methodical and assertive in developing an exit strategy. Around midnight, the officers formed a diamond around me and pushed through the mob to get outside.

My student hosts had a car waiting for me outside. I had to run to the car because we were met with more protestors outside who were also running at the car. We were able to drive away from SFSU but with no police escort or police following us to make sure we got where we needed to go safely. I was still in desperate fear for my safety the entire time I was in San Francisco and until I was eventually able to board a plane for the return flight home.

After being threatened, intimidated, assaulted, and held hostage not a day has gone by that I have not thought about these events, had flashbacks, and experienced emotional trauma at

realizing how close to being seriously injured or even killed I may have come. I have had nights where I can't fall asleep and continue to be unsettled about this whole matter knowing what these protestors wanted to do to me. At the same time, I am determined to do whatever I can do to make sure this never happens again to anybody.

A violent mob took control of a building and the campus police on the SFSU campus that evening, seeking to stamp out free speech and take a physical hostage. The mob was given free rein to do so and that certainly sent a message. The message is that those who encourage open dialogue that conflict with the radical left policies that control college campuses will not be protected nor will their safety be taken seriously.

The SFSU V.P. of Student Affairs Jamillah Moore released a statement applauding students for their "tremendously brave" efforts to "peacefully protest" someone as "personally abhorrent" as myself that evening. The email claimed the school welcomes and embraces diversity, yet it was more than evident they didn't welcome me and my perspective.

Kidnapping is not a peaceful protest. What happened to me throughout the evening of April 6 was not in any way peaceful.

Free speech suffers when university administrators do not condemn violence and kidnapping on their campus, it is chilled when administrators do not adequately prepare for and protect the safety of speakers - whether conservative or liberal - and free speech is undermined when administrators misrepresent and malign the views of those with whom they disagree.

I speak from experience when I say that free speech is under attack on college campuses around the country and many college administrators appear to only be giving aid and comfort to those who are trying to silence conservative speech on campus.