



Testimony before the House Subcommittee on Health Care and Financial Services: “The Importance of Protecting Female Athletics and Title IX”

**Kim Russell
Ambassador
Independent Women’s Forum
Tuesday, December 5, 2023**

I am Kim Russell, an ambassador for the Independent Women’s Forum (IWF). IWF is an educational 501(c)(3) dedicated to developing and advancing policies that aren't just well intended, but enhance freedom, opportunities, and well-being.

Why am I here? I’m 56 years old. I’m an athlete, a mom, a coach, a teacher, and an advocate for women and girls. This has been my life and my passion. I have been a women’s lacrosse coach for more than 27 years. I have been inducted into three halls of fame for coaching and contributing to the growth of lacrosse, and there is an award in my name.

Oberlin College removed me from coaching women’s lacrosse after I chose to publicly tell my story and refused to be silent or back down about my belief that men—no matter how they self-identify—should not be allowed to compete in women’s sporting events.

I joined the Oberlin College athletics department in 2018. Then, as now, I have always been pro-woman. Over the course of my coaching career, I have been a mentor to many women and girls, sharing advice both on and off the field.

My athletes, including several who have identified as transgender, have always known that they can come to me—to laugh, to cry, or anything in between.

I’ve been nicknamed the “hippie love coach,” not only because I’m a yoga instructor, am often barefoot, read energy, and coach intuitively, but because I’ve given countless individuals a safe space to thrive and feel a sense of belonging.

In March of 2022, I had been following the story of Lia Thomas and kept thinking someone would speak up. This was madness. How could a biological male be allowed to compete with women, regardless of a hormone blocker regime? I was flabbergasted that coaches, parents, administrators (at every level), and athletes were ok with this. No one was speaking up.

After Thomas won the NCAA D1 Women's 500-yard freestyle, I reposted an Instagram post on my personal Instagram story that said, "Congratulations to Emma Weyant, the *real* woman who won the NCAA 500-yard freestyle event." I added my own short commentary:

What do you believe? I can't be quiet on this... I've spent my entire life playing sports, coaching & starting sports programs for girls & women...

Turns out, it was more controversial than I could have ever anticipated.

My Instagram story taking a pro-woman stance led to a nightmarish campaign against me by Oberlin College administrators, members of the athletic department staff, and even some of my athletes.

Based on this simple post, I was called transgressive, transphobic, and unsafe. I was blown away. My athletic director told me to write letters of apology to my team and athletic department because of the unrest and disruption I had caused. I couldn't apologize for something I'm not sorry for. I would not and will not apologize for saying a biological male does not belong in women's sports and spaces.

As an athlete and coach for nearly my entire life, I am personally familiar with the distinct differences between male and female athletes. I've given birth to four children of my own, sometimes nursing one with another strapped to my back while running down the field during practice and games.

Like many sports, men's and women's lacrosse have differences—from rules to field size to level of contact—to account for the biological differences between the sexes. Biologically, males and females are different. To suggest otherwise is what's unsafe.

The Oberlin administration did not agree. After I refused to apologize, they attempted to demoralize and punish me. The Oberlin athletic director called for a meeting of my team with a mediator present. A handful of the student-athletes on my team attacked and vilified me as if I were the enemy and had just killed someone.

A week later, my AD asked me to have another meeting with my team and other college administrators, including herself, the Director for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (who was also the Title IX Coordinator), and the Athletics Diversity and Inclusion Designee Liaison.

For one hour and 42 minutes, each student-athlete had the opportunity to speak freely about what they didn't like about me. The same athletes whom I had treated like my own kids bashed me over and over again, simply for having a pro-woman perspective that was different from theirs.

The student-athletes were encouraged to speak their minds, but that wasn't the case for me—I had to stay quiet and repeat back everything they said to confirm I had listened to their concerns. At the end of the meeting, I was given the chance to respond, at which point I knew that whatever I said would land on deaf ears.

A week or so after the season ended, the AD called me into her office and handed me a letter. At the bottom, it said:

This letter is intended to help you understand and appreciate the impact of your actions and the need for you to immediately modify your behavior.

I asked Oberlin to provide me with a written letter on what I had done wrong and how I could improve my behavior but was never provided any clarity. That's disappointing, especially from a place of higher education.

When I accepted the job as Head Women's Lacrosse Coach & Wellness Instructor at Oberlin in August of 2018, I was so excited to be a part of an institution known to be one of the best in the country for academic rigor and achievement, as well as its world-renowned music conservatory. I had admired Oberlin as being a community that celebrates the free spirit, open-minded dialogue, freedom of speech, and freedom of expression.

But Oberlin—like many higher-level institutions these days—only seems to support the First Amendment if your values align with theirs.

Too many people, at Oberlin and elsewhere, have chosen to stay silent because the consequences seem too great—loss of family, loss of a job, loss of reputation, you name it. I am speaking out in part for them.

I will never apologize for believing that women and girls should have the right to single-sex competition—a right for which women before me fought tirelessly. I'm hoping that my speaking up will give other coaches, instructors, faculty, parents, and athletes the courage to do the same.

As of October 4th of this year, I am no longer employed by Oberlin College. And now, I know why. So I can be here, spending my time, advocating for women and girls, and doing my best to ensure that you understand the ramifications of the Biden administration's proposed regulations and that you will each do your job to ensure that the original meaning of Title IX is upheld.

Title IX passed when I was five. I have reaped the benefits, and my life's journey continues to be massively impacted by laws passed supporting women's rights. The Biden administration is trying to effectively change the meaning and language of Title IX. If allowed, this will endanger women in sports and private spaces, take away opportunities from women in sports and academia, and change vital statistics for academics, athletics, and medical documents. Never in a million years did I think I would be sitting here at 56 years old—fighting to get back the rights that were given to women and girls 51 years ago.

I have coached and taught girls and women of every age, at every level, from youth to international competition. I am the Director and Head Coach of Women's National Teams for the U.S. Virgin Islands Lacrosse Association. Just last month I had the opportunity to coach the U.S. Virgin Islands team, and my own daughter, at the Pan-American Lacrosse Association Sixes Tournament in Jamaica. It was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. The true love of this game and support for all—teams, athletes, staff, and administrators—filled my heart. Without Title IX, none of this would be possible.

Since March of 2022, many more biological males have invaded women's and girls' sports. There have been life-changing injuries, opportunities lost, and privacy has been invaded. We are harming women and girls. You have the opportunity to be heroes. This is about upholding truth, protecting the dreams of female athletes, and the original meaning of Title IX.

Thank you.