Northwest Washington Synod
Southwestern Washington Synod
Northwest Intermountain Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

A Pastoral Statement from the ELCA Bishops of Washington State Regarding Initiative 638

Dear Beloved People of God,

We, the bishops of Washington state, are deeply troubled by the passage of Initiative 638. This initiative prohibits transgender girls from participating in girls' school sports and requires additional medical verification of biological sex for all girls seeking to participate in athletics.

Every child is a beloved child of God. Every child. In Genesis 1:27, we hear that all humankind is created in the image of God. In Psalm 139, we hear that all people are fearfully and wonderfully made. These are not conditional promises. They are declarations of God's love for all people.

As many know, playing sports offers children and youth so much more than learning to win and lose. They learn teamwork, perseverance, and respect for others. They develop friendships, confidence, and relationships with coaches and mentors. Every child deserves these opportunities.

There is no question that this initiative most directly affects transgender girls, excluding them from these experiences. But it also creates new barriers for all girls. The United States has spent decades expanding opportunities for girls and women in sports. Now, in the name of protecting girls, Washington state will require additional medical verification of girls' bodies before they can compete. (Boys will not be subjected to any requirement like this.) These additional requirements raise serious concerns about privacy, access, and dignity, particularly for families already facing financial or geographic barriers.

We recognize genuine concerns about fairness in athletics. These concerns deserve thoughtful discussion, sound scientific evidence, and policies that account for the complexities of human development. Research is still developing on this. We should resist simplistic assumptions about athletic advantage. We should not punish our children because we, as adults, have been unable to hold thoughtful, respectful, and informed conversations about equity in sports.

To transgender girls, nonbinary and intersex children and youth, we want to say this directly:

You are beloved. You are not a problem to be solved. You are not a political argument. You are a person created in God's image, with gifts to share, friendships to enjoy, and a life that matters.

To the girls and women of Washington state:

Your dignity matters. Your opportunities matter. Your bodies deserve respect and privacy.

We can protect girls' sports without abandoning transgender children. We can seek fairness without sacrificing compassion. And we can disagree without denying the humanity of our neighbors.

We ask our congregations and communities to do more than offer kind words. Reach out to families with transgender children and youth. Stand against bullying and discrimination. Make our churches places of genuine welcome, safety and belonging.

Jesus calls us to love our neighbors, especially those who have been marginalized. May we love as Jesus calls us to love.

In Christ's Love,

Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee
Northwest Washington Synod

Bishop Keith Marshall
Southwestern Washington Synod

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