



Title IX Roundtable

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I'm Paula Scanlan, an ambassador for Independent Women's Forum and a former NCAA swimmer for the University of Pennsylvania. And I am here to testify on the importance of Title IX in regards to women's sports.

In September 2021, Lia (formerly Will) Thomas switched from the Penn Men's team to join my women's team. While Will had been an average swimmer on the men's team, Lia soon racked up personal best times in every freestyle event that shattered our team records.

While many of you already know this story and the countless other stories we hear nowadays of female athletes falling victim to sex-discrimination at the hand of "inclusive policies", what you do not hear often enough are the experiences of the women off the podium. I'd like to share one of mine from my time on the University of Pennsylvania swim team.

From the beginning, I was concerned about allowing Thomas to compete on the Women's side. I was concerned not just with fair competition and trophies, but also with equal opportunity. Because what many people do not realize is that every time Thomas raced, a girl lost a lane in the pool. And every time Thomas traveled to an away meet on behalf of Penn, a girl on the team was asked to stay home. It is not just Riley Gaines and the girls who raced Thomas who lost out. There are many, many girls who lost opportunities to race at the next level or even to compete at all because Thomas was allowed in the women's division.

Additionally, my teammates and I were forced to undress in the presence of Lia, a six-foot four-inch tall biological man fully-intact with male genitalia, 18 times per week. Some girls opted to change in bathroom stalls and others used the family bathroom to avoid this. When we tried to voice our concern to the University Athletic Department, we were told that Lia swimming and being in our locker room was non-negotiable and we were offered psychological services as an attempt to re-educate us to become comfortable with the idea of undressing in front of a male.

This was extremely uncomfortable for me, as prior to attending the University of Pennsylvania, I was sexually assaulted. The swimming locker room had always been a safe space for me, a

place where I felt safe. That is, until my university invited a male body to undress alongside me. I began to have nightmares and mentally had to relive my own attack every week that I changed in that locker room. Many of us dealt with our discomfort by changing in bathroom stalls or using the family bathroom.

The NCAA and the universities are supposed to protect their athletes. Instead, they've chosen inaction, and put the burden on athletes, like myself, to advocate for fairness, safety and privacy in our own sports. Title IX which was intended to provide female athletes with equal opportunities, has been ignored and our leaders have been silent. This silence sets women back decades and erodes all the hard work for Title IX and equal opportunity, and we need Congress's help to prevent female athletes from continued discrimination.