



**Opening Remarks to Joint Oireachtas Committee on Arts, Media, Communications, Culture and
Sport on Inclusion in Sport**

14th October 2026

Good afternoon Deputies, Senators, and colleagues from across the sport sector. I am delighted to be joining you today to be part of our conversation on inclusion in sport - a topic close to many of our hearts.

My name is Daire Dempsey, and I am the Executive Director of Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI). TENI is Ireland's national transgender community and advocacy organisation. We provide direct support, information and signposting to the trans community, our allies and family members; we provide education and training to schools, workplaces, universities, healthcare professionals, and service providers; and we advocate for positive change for our community.

For the past two years, we have been running a sports inclusion project, providing opportunities for trans young people and adults to engage in sports and healthy activity, upskilling sports bodies and clubs on trans inclusion, and developing resources to support that work - I have with me today our Sports Policy Guide, as an example of our work.

We developed the sports inclusion project as we know that sport plays a huge role in promoting positive mental and physical health, in developing community cohesion and friendship, and in combating isolation for everyone participating. This is important for all of us, and it is particularly important for trans people. Extensive research (detailed in our accompanying briefing document), and our direct work with community members, tells us that trans people experience poorer mental and physical health, increased isolation, and increased marginalisation than cisgender people, or people who are not trans. This makes sport particularly important.

Through our sports programme we've run nearly 20 events with trans people - trans people who have played sports their whole lives, trans people who've never played sports, trans people just getting into sports. What we've heard is how important sport can be as a space to make friends, to stay healthy, and to engage in the local community - but we've also heard about the many barriers that trans people face trying to take part in sport.

There has been a marked increase in negative media and political discourse about trans people participating in sport in the past five years. As a result of this, many sports bodies, or indeed States around the world, have introduced exclusionary policies to restrict or ban trans people from sport. As outlined in our briefing document, shared in advance, many of these policy decisions are fuelled by deeply flawed research, by concerns about safety and fairness that are well-founded but misdirected, and by the sheer problem of being a tiny minority community. When an estimated 1% of the



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population is trans, most people don't know anyone who is trans, or may not know that they do. Decisions about our access and participation in sport are being made by people who not only are not trans, but perhaps have never met or spoken with a trans person.

Even where policies are designed to govern elite competition, the impact trickles down to grassroots or recreational sports clubs. Suddenly, people who have been committed and valued members of clubs, are being excluded, being asked to leave, or being told they cannot continue participating, training, or competing. We've worked with children, some as young as 12, and adults, who have been asked to leave their clubs as a result of an exclusionary policy.

It can be easy to forget that trans people have always participated in sport - that trans people are, and always have been, welcomed and valued members of clubs, teams, and sporting communities all around Ireland. We want that to be able to continue. We want trans people to be able to head to their local GAA club, or swimming pool, or sailing club, on a Saturday morning, have fun, be part of a team, stay healthy, and be treated the same as everyone else. We want to see more protections for the safety and wellbeing of everyone participating in sport. We want to see more dedicated attention to inclusion and diversity in sport. We want everyone to have equal opportunities, on a level playing field.