

June 29, 2021

VIA HAND DELIVERY

Honorable Page Cortez
Louisiana Senate President
Louisiana State Senate
Post Office Box 94183
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

RE: Veto of Senate Bill 156 of the 2021 Regular Session

Dear President Cortez:

Please be advised that I have vetoed Senate Bill 156 of the 2021 Regular Session.

I have vetoed this bill for three important reasons, any of which should be sufficient to prevent this bill from becoming the law of Louisiana. However, the first reason prevails over the others. This bill will not be signed into law because it is targeted, unfairly, at children. This legislation will make life more difficult for children who are going through unique challenges gaining acceptance into their schools, communities, and sometimes even their own families. It should be our role, as leaders in this state, to reach out to and lift up these children, rather than to ostracize them. Moreover, the effect of this bill is not so much about how it would affect athletic events, because it will not (as discussed below). Instead, the real harm of this bill is that it would set as the policy of the State of Louisiana that there is something wrong with these children and that they should be treated differently from whom they really are. All of us are sons and daughters of this great state, and we should do and be better than that.

Secondly, this bill is not a real solution nor is there a real problem. When presented to the legislative committees, there was universal agreement that this issue is not, nor has it ever been, experienced in Louisiana. Indeed, the author of the bill repeatedly admitted as much. Instead, this was a bill that came forth from other states that were attempting to pass, sometimes successfully, similar legislation. In committee testimony, it was made clear that the Louisiana High School Athletics Association (LHSAA) already has policies in place that prevent any unfair advantages in athletic competition.

Lastly, it is clear that if this bill were to become law, it would have a major effect on the economy of Louisiana. Many national conventions and conferences have made it clear that they may not select Louisiana as a destination if this bill were to be signed. Further, the National

Honorable Page Cortez
Page Two
June 29, 2021

Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has suggested that championship events which are scheduled to take place in Louisiana (first up, the 2022 Men's Final Four) could be at risk if this bill becomes law. As Louisiana emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had such a negative effect on the tourism industry, we must be mindful of the crushing blow this legislation could pose to our economy.

I have said many times, and believe in my heart, that discrimination is not a Louisiana value. That remains true and is the basis for my decision to veto this bill. However, I also believe that there are many people who may have supported this bill who are good and decent Louisianans trying to do their best to address a complicated issue. Nevertheless, this bill is not the right approach nor is it the right thing to do.

Sincerely,

John Bel Edwards
Governor

cc: Honorable Clay Schexnayder
Speaker of the House of Representatives