

HB 163 Protecting Student Religious and Moral Beliefs Regarding Athletic Uniform Requirements

Sponsor: Rep. Candice Pierucci (R-Herriman)

Position: We support HB 163

Overview:

HB 163 would:

- Require schools and athletic associations that require a specific uniform to allow student athletes to wear “religious clothing with the athletic uniform; or [wear] clothing under, or with, but not substantially covering, the athletic uniform” while participating in an athletic activity;
- Allows students to wear clothing to “cover or conceal parts of the student's body that are not covered or concealed by the athletic uniform,”
- Explains that the clothing can be worn “under, or with, but not substantially covering, the athletic uniform;”
- Requires associations and educational organizations to provide the accommodating clothing if uniforms must be a certain material, style, or color;

Background:

In 2022, the Utah Legislature passed [HCR 16](#), a concurrent resolution to encourage Utah schools and athletic associations to allow youth to wear religious clothing or headwear to accommodate their religious beliefs or personal values of modesty.

After realizing this non-binding resolution wasn't enough, Rep. Pierucci is sponsoring HB 163 to move the enforcement needle from “encourage” to “require.” If HB 161 becomes law, schools and educational institutions will be required to accommodate religious and modest clothing for youth sport activities.

To support her bill, Rep. Pierucci cites a story about two young men who were told by a referee to remove their turbans, an integral aspect of their Sikh religion, before playing a basketball game. After threatening them with a forfeit, the referee allowed the young men to play after several bystanders explained the significance of their headwear,. The two young players were upset by their treatment. According to a [FOX13 report](#), “Harkirath [Sing Makhar] said the incident bothered them as they continued to play. He said in the more than 10 years he's been playing basketball, it has never happened before. “It kind of disrupted our game,” he said.

Talking Points:

- Youth athletes should not be required to choose between following their religious and moral beliefs and playing sports. Simple accommodations can be made to uniforms and clothing that do not disrupt the game or effectiveness of a uniform.
- HB 161 has support from Utah's diverse religious community. During the February 6 hearing at the House Education Committee, the Utah Muslim Civic League organized six people to testify in favor of HB161 who represented high school students, PTA members, school district officials, and members of various faith groups including the Muslim, Sikh, Jewish community.
- Other states like Illinois and Ohio have adjusted school sports rules to ensure that young athletes can wear faith-related garb as they compete.