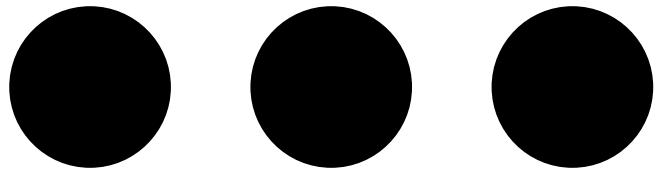




# Coach Sues School for Firing Him for Opposing Transgender Athletes in Girls' Athletics

An Oregon high-school track coach is suing his former employer after the school fired him for expressing the opinion that transgender athletes should compete against each other rather than against biological females.

Represented by the Chicago-based Liberty Justice Center (LJC), John Parks filed a [federal lawsuit](#) against the Lake Oswego School District (LOSD) Wednesday. The veteran coach, who has worked with high-school, collegiate, and Olympic athletes for more than 40 years, charged district officials with violating his First- and 14th-Amendment rights by terminating him without due process for expressing a viewpoint.



## Parks on Trans Mission

On May 15, Parks, then the head track-and-field and cross-country coach and a teaching assistant at Lake Oswego High School (LOHS), sent an email to Peter Weber, executive director of the Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA), which oversees high-school athletics in the Beaver State. In the letter, Parks expressed concern over the impact of OSAA's policy allowing transgender athletes to compete against girls, warning that it "has major flaws that are inviting the discrediting of the entire existence and value of female athletics."

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"I 100% support transgender students in every educational, academic and societal situation except in athletics where their bodies have a major physical and hormonal advantage," Parks wrote.

He cautioned that OSAA's policy attracted "heightened national attention" and politicized a nonpolitical competition, harming real girls and transgender ones alike. Furthermore, he noted, it conflicts with the policies of many major international athletic organizations such as the International Olympic Committee and the World Athletic Council, which are "based on scientific evidence."

Parks recommended creating "an open category like a gender neutral bathroom" that would give transgender athletes "competition opportunities but [not] make a mockery of the reason females



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compete in their own category.”

### **Haskins for Trouble**

Although Parks sent his letter to Weber, and a similar one to state Senator Rob Wagner, in his capacity as a private citizen, he gave LOHS Principal Kristen Colyer and Athletic Director Chris Coleman the opportunity to review it first. Neither one objected — that is, until Marshall Haskins, OSAA representative on diversity, equity, and inclusion, decided to launch a crusade against Parks.

Nine days after Parks dispatched his missive, Haskins fired off a letter to LOSD officials describing Parks’ actions — both in sending his email and in his capacity as a coach — as “premeditated, calculated and discriminatory in an effort to deny [one of our transgender] student’s participation at the state tournament and to create a hostile environment to shame our student.”

Haskins further alleged that Parks had engaged in various forms of “harassing discriminatory behavior” including “riling up state tournament spectators” to “‘boo’ our student athlete during the medal presentation.”

Parks denies all the allegations and claims to have witnesses who can disprove many of them.

Haskins also filed a complaint with LOSD alleging that Parks had violated the district’s nondiscrimination policy by suggesting that the transgender athlete be barred from competing with biological girls.

### **Parks Gets Unappealing Pink Slip**

On June 12, Colyer informed Parks that, following an internal investigation of Haskins’ allegations, “a preponderance of the evidence” indicated that Parks had indeed violated the nondiscrimination policy as well as the harassment, intimidation, and bullying policy. Thus, he was being terminated.

“Later,” alleges the lawsuit, “Principal Colyer verbally advised Parks that ‘he had no right to send the letter to Senator Wagner,’ and it was ‘illegal’ for him to do so.”

Parks, who had never been shown the evidence against him, let alone given the opportunity to respond to the allegations, appealed the findings of the investigation and his termination. His request was denied.

“I’m a staunch defender of transgender rights. For decades, I’ve been a voice for equitable and inclusive treatment for students with a wide variety of gender and sexual identities, on the track and in the classroom,” Parks said in an [LJC press release](#). “And I’ve seen that these athletic controversies are drawing negative attention to the trans community.”

In his letter to Weber, Parks stated that he has “2 trans extended family members” who agree with him and believe that the “negative attention ... alienat[es] too many in society they wish to gain the support of in other transgender legal efforts.”

### **Coach Demands Free Exercise**

Parks’ lawsuit contends that his firing constitutes “retaliatory action arising from his ... exercise of his free speech rights,” which the Supreme Court has ruled a public school may not undertake. “Absent proof of false statements knowingly or recklessly made by him, a teacher’s exercise of his right to speak on issues of public importance may not furnish the basis for his dismissal from public employment,” the court declared in [Pickering v. Board of Education](#) (1968).

The complaint further maintains that LOSD violated Parks’ 14th-Amendment rights because “he was



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entitled to procedural due process, including notice, a name clearing hearing, and a meaningful opportunity to respond to the false allegations levied against him” — none of which the district provided.

Parks is asking the court to issue preliminary and permanent injunctions against LOSD’s actions, to reinstate him to his former positions, and to award him “monetary damages.”

“Coach Parks was retaliated against, falsely accused of discriminatory behavior, denied an appeal, and fired — just for exercising his constitutional right to free speech as a private citizen,” said LJC senior counsel Buck Dougherty. “We are proud to stand up for his constitutional rights through this lawsuit, and we look forward to holding the District and the Board accountable for this egregious violation of free speech and due process.”



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