

Jessica Steffen
Testimony for Senate Bill 208

My name is Jessica Steffen. I was born and raised in Buhler, Kansas. I am now a 1L and Rice Scholar at the University of Kansas School of Law. Last spring, I graduated from Yale University, where I played NCAA Division I women's basketball.

At Yale, I was in a class of under 1,400 students. I was the only student from Kansas. Yale students often talk about the one thing that got them into Yale. For me, it was the ability to shoot a basketball from anywhere on the court.

That ability was honed playing countless pick-up games at the local YMCA, where there was not another girl on the court. The boys were bigger, stronger, and faster than I was. So, my game adapted to the fact that I could not compete with them physically. What I could do was shoot over the top of them.

I worked incredibly hard to develop my basketball skills. When I competed against other girls in middle school and high school, I was able to dominate. But, no matter how sophisticated my skills became, I could never overcome the superior size, strength and speed of the male players at the YMCA.

I realized as a Freshman in high school that I was never going to create a career out of basketball. But, I could turn it into the world's best education. And I did. I was able to do so because of generations of women who came before me, who fought tirelessly for Title IX. Title IX gives women athletes the right to equal opportunity in sports in educational institutions that receive federal funds. I was the benefactor of their hard work. And, I took advantage of it.

But, I know Yale. And, I know the coastal mentality. If we don't make a conscious decision here in Kansas to preserve those opportunities for young women, they will be taken away.

I am here today out of respect for the women who came before me, and gave me the opportunity to pursue an Ivy League education through high school sports. And, I am here for the girls younger than me – to help ensure that they have the same opportunity that I did. That is the absolute least that I can do. And, certainly a debt that I owe.

Today, I stand in support of Senate Bill 208.