

Women's Sports Foundation Disability in Sports Policy Recommendations for the First Year of the Obama Administration

The Women's Sports Foundation—the leading authority on the participation of women and girls in sports—advocates for equality, educates the public, conducts research and offers grants to promote sports and physical activity for girls and women. Founded by [Billie Jean King](#) in 1974, the Women's Sports Foundation builds on her legacy as a champion athlete, advocate of social justice and agent of change. We strive for gender equity and fight discrimination in sports.

The position highlights the Foundation's policy recommendation and rationale concerning disability equity in sports for the first year of the Obama Administration. In addition, we support many of the priorities identified by other civil rights organizations.

Recommendation:

Individuals with and without disabilities, male and female, must be provided with equal opportunities to participate in school-based physical education and athletic programs, mainstreaming such participation to the fullest extent possible and providing disability-specific programs when necessary.

Rationale:

We know that individuals with disabilities are not getting the same amount of physical activity and athletic opportunities as individuals without disabilities.

- More than 50 million (1 in 5) people in the United States have documented disabilities.
- Individuals with disabilities are almost three times as likely to be sedentary as individuals without disabilities (29% vs. 10%).
- Fifty-six percent of people with disabilities do not engage in any physical activity.
- Only 23% of people with disabilities are active for at least 30 minutes three or more times per week.
- During the 2008 Paralympic Summer Games in Beijing, 3,951 athletes participated, compared to 11,658 athletes in the 2008

Olympic Summer Games. Similarly, at the 2006 Paralympic Winter Games only 482 athletes participated, while 3,145 athletes participated in the 2006 Olympic Winter Games.

- The NCAA does not officially sanction any intercollegiate program, event or competition for individuals with disabilities.
- The National Federation of State High School Athletic Associations does not officially sanction any interscholastic program, event or competition for individuals with disabilities.

We know that the female athlete with a disability is in double jeopardy. She is discriminated against by her gender. She is discriminated against by her disability.

- Throughout all levels of sport women with disabilities are not getting as many opportunities as men with disabilities. Although women comprise half of the population of individuals with disabilities, in 2002, women and girls comprised less than 12% of all wheelchair basketball players in the world.
- Even at the Paralympic level, women are not receiving equivalent opportunities. In the 2006 Paralympic Winter Games, women comprised only 21% (99) of the athletes. Likewise, in the 2004 Paralympic Summer Games, 1,160 (31%) competed.
- Leadership gender disparities add to the hurdles for female athletes with disabilities. As of the 2008 Paralympic Games only two women (13.3%) serve on the 15-member International Paralympic Committee.

Yet we know that sports participation is critical for a female with a disability, just as it is for all females.

- A high school girl who plays sports is less likely to have an unintended pregnancy; less likely to be involved in drugs and more likely to graduate from high school than girls who do not play sports.
- Physical activity prevents health problems. It reduces the risk of developing heart disease and helps control weight, build lean muscle, reduce fat and prevent osteoporosis. As little as two hours of exercise a week on the part of a teenage girl can reduce her lifelong risk of breast cancer.
- Girls who play sports are more confident and have higher self-esteem and better body images than girls who do not.

For more information about the Foundation's disability policy priorities, you may contact Terri Lakowski, Public Policy Director, at 301.657.5829 or TLakowski@WomensSportsFoundation.org.