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Youth Sports Teams Across Illinois Cannot Discriminate Against Athletes with Disabilities

Teen Morgan Urso champions mental health support for youth in sports as the Illinois Court of Appeals confirms, for the first time, that sports teams cannot discriminate against their players under Illinois law.

Chicago, Illinois — On Friday August 19, 2022, teen mental-health advocate Morgan Urso prevailed in the Illinois Court of Appeals when three judges unanimously ruled for the first time that youth sports teams and organizations in Illinois must follow the Illinois Human Rights Act. Sports teams cannot discriminate against players based on their mental health condition, disability, or other status protected by state law.

Morgan Urso was a fifteen-year-old LaGrange teen when she was banned from her youth hockey team—Team Illinois—after sharing her mental health struggle with her coach Larry Pedrie. After confiding in her coach, he and a member of the AHAI board of directors agreed to banish Morgan from participating in any activities with the team and prohibited her from having any contact with Team Illinois players. The team even sent an e-mail to other players and their parents directing them to have no contact with Morgan. The e-mail stated that Morgan was removed from any involvement and communication with her teammates until she was back to “the positive, happy, smiling kid that we all know she is.”

For years, Team Illinois claimed to be exempt from the Illinois Human Rights Act that prohibits discrimination. The appeals court rejected that argument and explained that once Morgan earned a coveted place on Team Illinois’s roster, Team Illinois “could not then deny her on the basis of her disability the privilege of participation at athletic events held at places of public accommodation, such as Seven Bridges” Ice Arena where the team played. As Morgan’s attorney, HSPRD partner, [Charlie Wysong](#), explained, this is the first time a court has held “definitively that sports teams of all levels from youth soccer through competitive travel club hockey may not discriminate against their players under Illinois law.” The Illinois laws that protect people from discrimination “are more important now than they ever as the United State Supreme Court continues to narrow the protection of certain federal laws that fight discrimination,” explained Mr. Wysong.

Out of this terrible experience, Morgan has become a champion for mental health telling her story and youth struggling with their mental health that they are not alone. Morgan's story has received tremendous positive feedback, including support from #SameHere founder Eric Kussin and former NHL player [Rob Schremp](#), advocates for the #SameHere Global Mental Health Movement.

Morgan continues to use her story and voice to educate others about destigmatizing mental illnesses. She recently shared her story on the [Our Turn To Talk](#) podcast, alongside other youth talking about their experiences with mental health in their own words. The campaign aims to fight the stigma around mental health conditions. Morgan is also featured in a documentary by the same group coming out in October 2022. The [trailer for the new film](#) launched the same day that Morgan prevailed in court.

Morgan's case was pending in the Second District Appellate Court of Illinois as *M.U. ex rel. Kelly U. and Nick U. v. Team Illinois Hockey Club, Inc. and The Amateur Hockey Association of Illinois, Inc.*, Case No. 2-21-0568 (2d Dist. Aug. 19, 2022). The court ruled that Team Illinois is subject to the Illinois Human Rights Act and that Morgan can proceed with her claims against both her hockey club Team Illinois and the Amateur Hockey Association of Illinois, Inc. (AHAI), which is the governing body in Illinois for USA Hockey.

The decision: [LINK](#)

For additional information about the case, please contact Charlie Wysong, cwysong@hsplegal.com.

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