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Susan Manchester, Chair
Ohio House Families, Aging and Human Services Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Chairwoman Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona and Ranking Member Denson,

I am the parent of a transgender child whom I unconditionally love and support. I am deeply opposed to House Bill 454. Banning mental and physical gender affirming care for minors in Ohio would have far reaching negative and potentially life destroying effects upon not only my child, but hundreds of other young people in Ohio. You have spent two weeks hearing testimony from parents who do not support their transgender children. Their testimony is not reflective of my experience and I demand equal time to share my story.

In the summer of 2020 my assigned female at birth child revealed to me that she did not feel like a girl and had felt like a boy on the inside for a long time. Realizing he felt like a boy on the inside when everyone else saw him as a girl caused my child to feel extremely depressed. He was afraid to tell me or anyone else because he was afraid of rejection. My child hid his real feelings and who he is from me, because he was afraid I would reject him and this breaks my heart.

I'm not going to lie. I was initially shocked and went through a very emotional process coming to terms with the fact that my daughter was in fact my son. It was not easy to change so much about what I thought I knew and understood about my child and the nature of gender. I have done a great deal of reading and research and I have spent a great deal of time examining my own heart. I was shocked I found out that transgender youth who do not feel supported and loved at home are 3 times more likely to die from suicide than their gender conforming peers, but transgender youth who are loved and supported at home are at no greater risk of suicide than other kids. I love my child and I want him to know he can be his genuine self with me. I don't want to risk losing my child when all I have to do is provide him with a safe home where he can feel loved and supported. The choice between either helping my child thrive, or forcing my child to feel miserable and alone and possibly losing my child was clear. I had to make the best choice for my child.

The American Academy of Pediatricians and the Endocrine Society recommend gender-affirming medical and mental health for transgender youth. Additionally, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the American Psychiatric Association (APA) view gender-affirming care as evidence-based patient care. So based on this evidence I sought the best care for my child. My son, Aiden, is currently receiving gender affirming care through the THRIVE program at Nationwide

Children's Hospital. At this stage his care primarily focuses on gender affirming mental health care and he has socially transitioned.

Socially transitioning to live as his true self has made a world of difference for Aiden. He is so much happier and much more confident. Our relationship is closer because he knows I love and support him as his genuine self. Forcing him to go back to living as a person he is not would be life destroying for him.

Please consider Aiden and the hundreds of Ohio youth like him when you vote on this bill. Please don't force kids to live as someone they are not. We all deserve the freedom to live as our authentic selves at any age.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Denice C Kocher