
To: Susan Manchester, Chair; Al Cutrona, Vice Chair; Sedrick Denson, Ranking Member; and Members of the Families, Aging and Human Services Committee

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for considering my testimony.

HB 454 would cause children to suffer and die and would damage the culture, communities and economy of Ohio. I am the father of a transgender child and I write today in opposition to the SAFE act. Gender affirming care literally saved my child's life and should be supported by law. Current practice for transgender youth has been determined by medical professionals and should be supported, not undermined, by you, our public servants. Families, like mine, who have the resources and options to do so will flee Ohio to protect and care for our children, and the state of Ohio will suffer for it.

My wife and I live in suburban Cincinnati and we both work as technical professionals. I work at a private chemical company and she works at a consumer products company. We have two kids. Our younger daughter is going into the 3rd grade. She spends her time playing with her friends in the neighborhood and practicing gymnastics. Our older child is non-binary and starting the 8th grade in the fall. They are into graphic art and play clarinet in the school band. Both of our children are kind and curious, and we love them both immensely. Like any parents, will do anything to provide for their safety and well-being.

When our older kid was 10, they came out to us as non-binary. They don't identify as a boy, and they don't identify as a girl. We did our best to learn about this topic and eventually got them access to the Teen Health Clinic at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. At Children's they receive care for gender dysphoria, and also for anxiety and depression. In the fall of 2021, their depression was particularly bad, and they had formulated a plan to commit suicide. At our regular appointment with their social worker, she recommended our kid be placed in inpatient psychological care. While this was traumatic for all of us, I believe it prevented a suicide attempt and saved our kid's life.

As part of their care, they started hormone treatment to stop their menstruation and antidepressants to ease the impact of the other stresses in their life. The change has been enormous and positive. Now that our kid can live as their authentic self their life has improved 100%. We have many challenges ahead of us and they will continue to require care and support for the rest of their life. But today, a bright, funny, loving, and sweet teenager is

alive because of gender affirming care. The medical community and parents like me have the right continue this.

Not only is HB 454 harmful for families with trans kids, the problem it claims to solve does not exist. What I wish to emphasize is that this care is done by a team of professionals in coordination: pediatrician, therapist, dietician, social worker, school counselor, psychiatrist, etc. At no time have our medical decisions been made capriciously. The staff of Children's and the other organizations involved are guided by experience, expertise, and best practice to achieve the best possible outcome for our child's health. At any time, our family could have changed course, sought other opinions, or stopped treatment based on our judgment. There are many real problems for families in Ohio and I hope the committee will focus on those issues and let us and our doctors provide the safe and effective medical treatment our kids need.

If the state of Ohio passes HB 454, and if it survives legal challenge, we will leave to seek a better life for our family elsewhere. We have seen first-hand the impact of gender affirming care for the kids who need it. This is literally a matter of life and death and many kids will suffer and die in the state of Ohio if HB 454 becomes law. Doctors and scientists are firmly opposed to this bill. So are families and communities who just want what's best for our trans kids and want nothing more than to be left alone to exercise our rights to treat our kids according to the best available care based on research and practice.

The state of Ohio will be worse off if HB 454 becomes law. Gender diversity makes our communities better, stronger, and safer. Companies have embraced diversity of all kinds, both because it's the right thing to do, and because it's good business. States that welcome and support diversity are thriving and growing, while states that discriminate against people based on identity are losing the competition for talent and jobs. Most importantly, gender affirming care improves and saves the lives of transgender children.

HB 454 will do the opposite of what it purports to. It will not make kids safe and it will not provide parents with freedom to choose. Instead, it will criminalize health care for kids and force parents to either break the law or leave the state. Your responsibility to families like mine and to your state is to vote against House Bill 454.

Sincerely,

Rob Hart