

November 16, 2022

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the Committee,

My name is Laura Robertson-Boyd. I live in Columbus, Ohio with my husband of 25 years. We are the proud parents of two transgender children, and we love our children unconditionally. I am here today to defend my children – and all Ohio transgender children – by speaking in opposition to House Bill 454.

HB 454 is dangerous because it denies transgender and non-binary children access to evidence-based health care deemed medically necessary by their health care providers. It completely interferes with and strips away parents' rights to make the best decisions about their children's health care in partnership with physicians and counselors.

How dare you tell me that I have no right to do what is best for my children? Why do the sponsors, Representatives Click and Grendell, and the 23 co-sponsors of HB 454 think that State Legislators somehow know better than I do what is best for my children? And why do you think that singling out transgender children for discrimination is OK? All Ohio children deserve the right to medically appropriate health care. The American Medical Association recently issued a statement saying, "Decisions about medical care belong within the sanctity of the patient-physician relationship" (1), and they deemed state legislative efforts to prohibit medically necessary gender-affirming care for minor patients "a dangerous intrusion into the practice of medicine" (1).

HB 454 claims to protect children from "experimental" treatment, which I suppose is how you justify othering my children and denying them the same basic civil rights as all other Ohio children. But you are completely wrong. Treatment for trans and non-binary youth is in no way experimental. Gender-affirming medical care for transgender youth is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatricians (2) and the Endocrine Society (3) and is viewed by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)(4) and the American Psychiatric Association (APA)(5) as evidence-based patient care. Over the past 2 decades, protocols have been developed to provide transgender youth with gender-affirming medical care by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (6). Treatment for trans youth is well-defined and established, NOT experimental. [I have included all these position statements in the footnotes section of my testimony for your reference.]

HB 454 would recklessly outlaw all medical care for trans youth, revoke the licenses of any medical professionals who treat them, and subject them to civil lawsuits – simply for doing their jobs. This is completely irresponsible and dangerous. According to the Trevor Project's 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, over half of all transgender youth have considered suicide in the past year, and 20% have attempted suicide (7). Further, 2 in 3 transgender youth experience depression and anxiety (7), and 85% say that recent debates over

anti-transgender bills have had a negative impact on their mental health (8). HB 454 will do nothing but exacerbate these feelings, putting even more young lives at risk.

My greatest fear for my children is the risk of suicide if they cannot receive the medically necessary healthcare they require to live their lives as their true authentic selves. HB 454 would deny my children that care, putting them at greater risk of suicide, and I will not allow this Legislature to threaten my children's lives with this dangerous bill.

My second greatest fear for my children is the risk of harm from others who want to attack them out of hate simply for who they are. HB 454 represents just that; it is nothing more than bullying and state-sponsored abuse. As a mother, I will not allow you to bully my children or erase their existence with this bill.

HB 454 is one of over 130 anti-transgender bills introduced in state legislatures across America just this year by anti-LGBTQ groups, including the Family Research Council and Alliance Defending Freedom, which are designated as hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center (9), and carried here in Ohio by the Center for Christian Virtue (10). Let's be clear about the purpose and intent of these bills: This is not about protecting children. This is about using transgender children as a cultural wedge issue to keep the conservative base riled up so they turn out to vote so the current majority can retain power. I will not allow you to use my children as political pawns in your culture wars that damage their emotional and psychological health and authorize the broader public to demonize them. Shame on you for treating children this way – putting them at greater risk of self-harm and harm from others for your own political gain.

Next, let's talk about government overreach. The majority in this Legislature have put forth numerous bills to limit the government's ability to impose restrictions on individual freedoms, including HB 218 which would prohibit vaccine mandates. According to the Ohio Capital Journal, the bill's sponsor, Vice Chair Cutrona, "framed the bill as a protection of personal autonomy" (11), and Representative Stein said the bill is about "free will and personal choice between physicians and families" (11). Furthermore, this Committee will be hearing HCR 26 tomorrow – a bill "to affirm the rights of patients and families to direct health care decisions." How can you honestly defend the personal choice between physicians and families when it comes to vaccines, and argue that patients and families should be in charge of their own healthcare decisions, yet completely strip away parental and family rights when it comes to medical treatment for transgender youth? Is that not complete government overreach?

Lastly, HB 454 would prohibit private insurance companies from providing coverage for gender-affirming care for transgender youth. If enacted into law, employers across Ohio will lose valuable employees who depend on health insurance coverage to provide medically necessary care for our children. If we cannot get the benefits our families need in Ohio, we will be forced to move to a state that is not so hateful, discriminatory, and heartless.

I urge you to have compassion for Ohio's transgender children. Do not deny them their basic humanity and civil rights. Vote no on HB 454.

Thank you.

Laura Robertson-Boyd

Footnotes:

1. AMA press release. AMA to states: Stop interfering in health care of transgender children. *American Medical Association*. April 26, 2021. <https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/press-releases/ama-states-stop-interfering-health-care-transgender-children>
2. Jason Rafferty, Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, Committee on Adolescence, Section on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health and Wellness, Michael Yogman, Rebecca Baum, Thresia B. Gambon, Arthur Lavin, Gerri Mattson, Lawrence Sagin Wissow, Cora Breuner, Elizabeth M. Alderman, Laura K. Grubb, Makia E. Powers, Krishna Upadhy, Stephenie B. Wallace, Lynn Hunt, Anne Teresa Gearhart, Christopher Harris, Kathryn Melland Lowe, Chadwick Taylor Rodgers, Ilana Michelle Sherer; Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children and Adolescents. *Pediatrics* October 2018; 142 (4): e20182162. 10.1542/peds.2018-2162. <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/142/4/e20182162/37381/Ensuring-Comprehensive-Care-and-Support-for>
3. Wylie C. Hembree, Peggy T. Cohen-Kettenis, Louis Gooren, Sabine E. Hannema, Walter J. Meyer, M. Hassan Murad, Stephen M. Rosenthal, Joshua D. Safer, Vin Tangpricha, Guy G. T'Sjoen, Endocrine Treatment of Gender-Dysphoric/Gender-Incongruent Persons: An Endocrine Society Clinical Practice Guideline, *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, Volume 102, Issue 11, 1 November 2017, Pages 3869–3903, <https://doi.org/10.1210/jc.2017-01658>
4. Adelson, S. L., & the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) Committee on Quality Issues (CQI). Practice parameter on gay, lesbian, or bisexual sexual orientation, gender non-conformity, and gender discordance in children and adolescents. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 51, 957– 974. 2012. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2012.07.004>
5. APA Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance. Report of the Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance. *Washington, DC: American Psychological Association*. 2008. <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/gender-variant-2.pdf>
6. World Professional Association for Transgender Health. (2012). *Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People* [7th Version]. <https://www.wpath.org/publications/soc>

7. The Trevor Project. 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health. *West Hollywood, California: The Trevor Project*. 2021. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/?section=Introduction>
8. Sandy West. Targeted by Politicians, Trans Youth Struggle with Growing Fear and Mental Health Concerns. *Kaiser Health News*. February 23, 2022. <https://khn.org/news/article/transgender-youth-mental-health-targeted-by-politicians/>
9. Henry Berg-Brousseau. ICYMI: As lawmakers escalate attacks on transgender youth across the country, some GOP leaders stand up for transgender youth. *Human Rights Campaign* [press release]. March 24, 2022. <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/icymi-as-lawmakers-escalate-attacks-on-transgender-youth-across-the-country-some-gop-leaders-stand-up-for-transgender-youth>
10. Laura A. Bischoff. Center for Christian Virtue, a heavy hitter in Ohio's culture wars, buys building across from Statehouse. *The Columbus Dispatch*. November 29, 2021. <https://www.dispatch.com/story/news/politics/2021/11/29/center-for-christian-virtue-plans-columbus-building-purchase-renovation/6182471001/>
11. Jake Zuckerman. House GOP passes vaccine mandate ban after months of effort. *Ohio Capital Journal*. November 18, 2021. <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2021/11/18/house-gop-passes-vaccine-mandate-ban-after-months-of-effort/>