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Eight years ago, on a December night, just after Christmas, Leelah Alcorn stepped out in front of a semi truck on I-71 just outside of Lebanon Ohio. Members of the committee, Leelah Alcorn and I were both born in 1997 she lived the next town over from where I grew up. We were both from large Christian families, and we were both trans, and she killed herself and I became a substitute teacher.

Leelah and I both knew we were trans at an early age. Our primary difference is that Leelah trusted her parents, she came out to them as a young teenager and asked for help, I knew better. Leelah came out to her parents and they told her it was a phase, they sent her to therapists they chose, who tried to convince her to desist. But Leelah was trans. When her parents discovered she was out at school, they not only unenrolled her, but also cut off all access to her friends and support network. In her suicide note, Leelah thought her life was over because at 16 having not gotten on blockers, she thought she'd be doomed to look like a man for the rest of her life. Her vision of transness was a life of harassment and abuse and not worth living.

Today I work with trans kids every single day, they're happy and they're hopeful, and they just want to live their lives. Maybe, some of them, won't always be trans, some kids do talk about when they experimented with their gender before discovering, their gender assigned at birth fits pretty well. But some of them will be. Some of them are trans, and punishing them for that, punishing them for how they exist in this world won't ever change that fact. They are not coerced or tricked as is suggested by sec. 3129.05. I don't bring up my transness in class. Trans people aren't out there trying to trick children into being trans in some kind of diabolical sado-masochistic scheme. Trans kids come to me, shy, and conspiratorial, and proud of their own identity desperate for a person with whom to share it. They like having representation, seeing that there is hope, that trans people can be happy. Trans kids want to be out, they know who they are. They also know who they can trust, and sometimes that doesn't include their parents. If you force teachers to out these kids to their families against their better judgement, you are condemning them to the same fate as Leelah. Kids aren't property, they're people.

World professional standards are transparently clear about what treatment is best for trans people. Doctors are using standard medications, for standardized uses, for standard treatments. You know this because this bill explicitly includes caveats to continue to allow blockers and hormone supplements for other kids who need them, as long as they aren't trans. You even include an exception for the genital mutilation of intersex infants. This bill explicitly allows the only genital mutilating surgeries that are actually being done on prepubescent children. You call this bill the Save Adolescents From Experimentation act, but really it sounds like you are the ones who want to do the experimentation. 'What happens when we ignore professional medical standards, and remove social support from children of a stigmatized minority group.'

In the end of her suicide letter Leelah states "The only way I will rest in peace is if one day transgender people aren't treated the way I was, they're treated like humans, with valid feelings and human rights. Gender needs to be taught about in schools, the earlier the better. My death needs to mean something. My death needs to be counted in the number of transgender people who commit suicide this year. I want someone to look at that number and say "that's fucked up" and fix it. Fix society. Please." For the past eight years we've been doing our best to live up to that request, things have gotten better, and safer, and healthier for trans kids everywhere. Members of the committee we know what happens when you isolate trans kids, when you cut off their hope for a better future, and you treat them as wrong just for being different. Treat these kids as human beings, don't take away their hope. If any trans kids are watching this, I had to wait till I was twenty three to get hormones, and whether it seems possible today or not it does get better. I urge the committee, please, to vote against hb 454.