

My name is Noel Reed. I am a life-long resident of Ohio, having grown up in Upper Arlington, Ohio and now reside in Athens, Ohio. I love this state as I love a family member, but if HB 454 were to be passed, I fear this beloved place of mine would feel to me as a beginning to an end.

I'm not sure if I wish to appeal to the transphobia of the supporters of this bill. If you cannot recognize that an individual is under full agency and awareness of themselves in order to announce and live their gender identity—or in other words, if you're not able to recognize that trans people are not delusional and crippled, but instead cognizant and self-aware probably much more than you feel you are—then I'm not sure how much hope I have for you to empathize with trans people in a way that isn't condescending and dehumanizing.

Instead, I wish to dissect the horrifying ramifications of the provisions that would require medical professionals to disclose a child's gender questioning to parents. This act alone is a violation of every child. The confidentiality of a setting such as therapy or talks with another medical practitioner is vital to sufficient care. Children are always trying to find themselves in the confusion of youth. The supporters of this bill, who I assume either are parents or aspire to be parents, or else have a vendetta in matters that don't concern them, of course have an influence in shaping this identity, and to an extent it is their duty to help a child along in this process.

However, the socialization of a child is not and should not be made in the house alone. Socialization confined to the house makes for an underdeveloped, inflexible adult. And so it is necessary that children take in influence from elsewhere in order to establish themselves, or else we'd expect children to be financially and socially dependent on their parents well into adulthood.

This may mean that your child, or your friend's child, or your child's child may identify as gender non-conforming. And though this may go against every fiber of your moral makeup, of which I can dissect in another letter, who are you to deny them of a life where they've found meaning and identity? Who are you to violate them of their ability to navigate the world knowing that they do and can have secrets, from you especially? Who are you to deny them autonomy, even as a child where autonomy is asterisked? If a trained medical professional believes a child has a good head on their shoulders, even and especially if they are questioning their gender, who are you to question that? Who are you to be over-controlling, over-surveilling, over-thinking a child's inner life?

The reality of living a socialized life is that you will disappoint, resent, and mistrust all those you love and/or are surrounded by at one point or another. I hope you have the strength to deal with this untidiness in a rational, emotionally intelligent manner. If not, I hope you talk to a therapist, or else find that strength in other ways. Even those who do deal with the discomforts of emotion well see therapists. Therapy relies on its confidentiality to be effective. Of course, there is the caveat that things discussed in therapy can be disclosed if the person intends to harm themselves or others physically. Which is where you're probably doing mental gymnastics in saying that gender questioning is a form of self-harm.

I can wax poetic about how I view that consciously marginalizing yourself from the norms of society in a way that doesn't hurt yourself or others is not a delusion but a strength, in that you are able to identify your own happiness and peace of mind as more forceable than the expectations set upon you. But again, I'm not sure, dear reader/listener of mine, that this'll be of much use since I don't know your values.

But I know you have secrets. And if we all collectively decide that exploring one's identity is a violation so heinous that it doesn't deserve confidentiality, then what does this mean for the future of the right to privacy? Will you disclosing to a therapist that you've thought about cheating on your spouse be considered a violation of the family, and thus be disclosed to your spouse for the good of such family? What about all your unmet desires, whether they be of making your own way in your profession (violation of the employer-employee relation!), your love life (violation of romantic norms!), your life that almost was in the past (violation of linear time!)?

To be respectful of children, to view them as human as you are, is to allow them their privacy in appropriate ways. Of course, a child should be to an extent supervised, and it is in a parent's volition that they decide how they do this. But there is a point at which you overstep this, and supervision becomes total control, and makes for a child that resents themselves or you, and most often both. If a child is not allowed a safe place such as a medical office to disclose what they struggle with, what they question, regardless of what a parent has socialized them as, how are they to feel safe? How are they to not feel overly consumed by their parents and what their parents want of them? How are you, reader/listener, at peace with yourself as a parent or potential parent to think that the only way for you to love and trust your child is to not allow them to figure out and be themselves, irrespective of how you feel about it?

As a life-long resident of Ohio, I say NO to HB 454 and request the indefinite suspension of a vote on this bill. I do this on behalf of children everywhere, as well as society more broadly. In an age where almost everything about you can be found on the internet, why should we further devastate an individual's right to privacy?