

Hello, my name is Bhageerathi Ganesan, and I am providing testimony **in opposition** to House Bill 454 on behalf of myself as an Ohioan and as a future physician.

As a medical student placed at a children's hospital for my clinical education, I've seen first-hand how our health system is struggling to bear the weight of a mental health crisis among our youth – the lack of service availability has left many families waiting months to get care, particularly if they live in locations where such care is lacking. I am particularly concerned about youth who identify as trans/gender-nonconforming. This group experiences disproportionately high rates of homelessness, physical violence, substance use and high-risk sexual behaviors¹⁻⁴ all while having higher rates of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide⁵⁻⁷.

Given the unique challenges faced by trans/gender non-conforming youth, it is pertinent that we find ways to bolster the health and well-being of this group. I believe that every child deserves access to the treatments and resources that they need to thrive; and every family should be equipped with the knowledge and support necessary to get them there. Research tells us that while mental health care is absolutely necessary, for many adolescents with gender dysphoria, it is not sufficient^{8,9}. Therefore, it is crucial that youth with gender dysphoria receive appropriate assessments and access to *all* the treatments that they and their care teams believe are in their best long-term interest, including the medical interventions that HB 454 seeks to ban. Such medical interventions, as it stands today, affect only the individual child who expresses gender dysphoria. As such, the decision to undertake such medical interventions lies only between the child, their guardians, and the physician who exercises their best clinical judgment.

HB 454 seeks to restrict evidence-based health care for young people while inserting legislators into the relationship between minor, their guardians, and their medical providers in an unprecedented manner. I am concerned about the messages this bill sends about Ohio's dedicated healthcare providers, the impact it will have on our ability to provide the best care possible to our communities, and its potential impact on our healthcare workforce:

1. The language of this bill implies that medical treatment for gender dysphoria is being provided in an unsafe, experimental manner and it implies that health providers are not doing their due diligence of evaluating the myriad of factors which impact youth who experience gender dysphoria. In previous testimony to this committee, representatives from leading pediatric hospitals in the state have clarified emphatically and in no uncertain terms that this is not the case. Clinical practice guidelines from the Endocrine Society, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health recommend that adolescents diagnosed with gender dysphoria receive mental healthcare prior to and concurrent with any pharmacologic treatment^{8,10,11}. Said clinical practice guidelines are backed by large-scale studies with high levels of statistical power and statistical significance. Again, these are not partisan groups with an agenda that say this – the real positive impact of gender-affirming care can be seen in the numbers. The misrepresentation of gender-affirming care as

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something that children and families are being actively coerced into is patently false, as any primary care physician, plastic surgeon, or endocrinologist can tell you.

2. This bill raises important concerns about the need, effectiveness, and long-term impacts of various gender-transition medical treatments. When I, as a medical student, took an oath upon receiving my short white coat, part of that oath was to commit to practicing evidence-based medicine that is rooted, to the very best of our understanding, in established scientific consensus – in short, I swore to uphold the truth and only the truth. Every day physicians live up to this oath by applying medical evidence and research in an evidence-based, nuanced manner to ensure quality, safe healthcare and provide the best outcomes they can – care for trans/gender-nonconforming youth is no different. This is their job, and it will be our job, too, in a few years. I think you would all agree that Ohio kids deserve the best we have to offer, and that includes an investment in understanding the best approaches to serving gender-diverse youth. As a point of pride, Ohio has some of the best hospital systems in the country. We have the opportunity to be leaders in improving the health/well-being of this group. This bill would crush any opportunity for us to do this important research, and this bill would prevent us as future physicians from doing our jobs in an evidence-based way.
3. The text of this bill highlights the risks inherent to some of the interventions without giving regard to the magnitude or frequency of those risks. This is deeply misleading. Indeed, no medical intervention is without risk, whether this be an herb or herbal supplement, manual manipulation therapies like massage/osteopathic/chiropractic, prescription medication, or surgical intervention. For example, when I had my gallbladder removed, I was informed of a risk of sepsis of about 1% - not uncommon – and the mitigations that would occur to try to prevent this. When a family considers gender-affirming therapies, these risks with their relative frequency and magnitude are explained to all families when they are counseled about their options, as is an objective evaluation of the risk-benefit ratio for the specific patient. With the help of primary care physicians and pediatric endocrinologists, such risks are managed and monitored to minimize adverse outcomes. Again, the final call on choosing to pursue therapy lies with the child and the family, because the child is the sole person affected by the care.
4. The text of this bill encourages schools to reveal if a child does not confirm to the gender assigned at birth. This sets a dangerous precedent. Not every child has a safe environment to express who they are and how they feel at home; for many children, school is the only place they can feel safe and express themselves safely. When a child is outed in this manner, it sets up an environment ripe for abuse and mistreatment at home, particularly if that child's family is not very accepting. Take the case of Leelah Alcorn, a young, bright transgender girl who passed away by suicide because of the transphobic abuse, isolation, and erasure she had endured from her parents. I urge you to read the note she left before she passed – it shows, point-blank, the kinds of families that you may be outing a

child to and the effects of the abuse that follows. No child should EVER be driven to such a point.

5. I am concerned that this bill would force Ohio's providers to decide between violating their ethical duty to provide the best care possible patients, or lose their license for upholding such an ethical standard. I don't want to be put in that position, and neither do many of my classmates. If this bill passes, many of us will be incentivized to establish our practice in a state that would not force us to choose between our livelihood and doing what is right for our patients, which would be an unfortunate waste of this state's investment in our education thus far. This should be of grave concern to this committee, as the US Department of Health and Human Services predicts that Ohio will have a primary care physician shortage of 13% by 2025¹². Amidst an epidemic of youth mental health concerns, along with our state's abysmal infant/maternal mortality rates and addiction crisis, this committee should be prioritizing efforts to keep Ohio's physicians in this state.

Lastly, all of this attention on such a small minority of children, who deserve love and care, speaks volumes to the culture in our state. As a young person who may one day have their own family, I want to live somewhere where all people are loved and accepted for who they are, and who have access to the resources they need to thrive. And I believe that we can build that here in Ohio, but not if this statehouse imposes itself on the complex decisions that children are making with their guardians and their doctors. I strongly urge you to vote against this bill and I thank you for your time and consideration.

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