

Testimony of Nick Zingarelli Against House Bill 454

My name is Nick Zingarelli and I appreciate being provided with the opportunity to speak in opposition to House Bill 454. This will be the first time I have shared my story with the Ohio House of Representatives, but it has become a familiar one for me to share with lawmakers. I provided similar live testimony four times to Missouri's legislators in March and April of this year. I really hoped that I would not be addressing this topic again so soon.

I was born in Columbus, Ohio. I received my bachelor's degree from the University of Cincinnati. I work as an attorney in private practice in Cincinnati. My child was born in Cincinnati and aspires to be a Bearcat, just like her parents. We moved to St. Louis in 2019 because my wife always wanted to be close to her large family that lives there. Earlier this year, we decided to move back to Cincinnati for a lot of reasons but, ultimately, it's because Ohio is our home.

From the time our child was born, we called our child our son. We did this because we had limited information to work from. But over the course of our child's life, our child found ways to tell us that this was not her truth. Our child loved to grow her hair long and have her fingernails painted. Our child loved to wear my wife's jewelry. Our child would be misgendered in public and it never bothered her. Our child loves the color pink so much that she insisted on having her room painted pink. Our child loves unicorns. About three weeks before she came out to her mom and I, we went shopping for Christmas decorations for our front lawn. Our child's choice was an inflatable unicorn with a rainbow that said "Merry Christmas."

About a week before Christmas in 2020, our child gave us a letter that my wife and I were required to read together. She came out to us as transgender. She signed the letter "your daughter." She had given us all of the signs and clues to guide us along the way and then ultimately had the courage to confirm this reality.

Over the next year, a lot happened and yet not much at all happened. We had her name and gender pronouns changed through her school. Her school supported us on her journey. We had her regularly meet with a counselor. Her counselor supported her. She came out to friends and family. They supported her. We met with a doctor at

St. Louis Children's Hospital, who told us that there was nothing to be done until she started puberty.

After our daughter came out, we met parents of other transgender kids, who educated us on the fight that is required to make sure that your child can be their true selves in Missouri. My wife traveled to Missouri's capital city of Jefferson City last year to testify against bills just like the one that is before the committee today. She told the legislature of the stress and anxiety of proposed laws that take away our daughter's right to receive the medical care that she needs. As I mentioned earlier, I traveled to Jefferson City to testify against four separate bills this year.

The legislative session in Missouri lasts from January through May. During those months, we worried constantly about whether today would be the day that some kind of unfair and exclusionary legislation would be passed. No legislation was passed this year that affected the rights of transgender youth. It was a time to exhale, but unfortunately, this relief has proven to be short lived. I never dreamt that I would be in a new fight to protect my daughter's rights so soon.

We chose to move back to Ohio because I know this state is a more inclusive and welcoming place than where we left. The Ohio where I grew up and that I have always been so proud to call my home state would not pass unnecessary laws that infringe on the privacy that should exist between a child, the child's parents, and the child's doctors. My Ohio would not prohibit counselors from providing a safe place for children to get the mental health treatment that they need. My Ohio would not force these counselors to breach the confidentiality that is to exist between a counselor and patient except for extreme circumstances. This can be dangerous. For some children, their home is not a safe place and their parents are not safe people.

Leelah Alcorn was a beautiful 17-year-old transgender girl from Cincinnati, Ohio. She first discovered that she was transgender when she was 14 and "cried of happiness." She immediately told her mom. Leelah's mom reacted extremely negatively. She told Leelah that it was a phase, that she would never truly be a girl, that God doesn't make mistakes, that Leelah was wrong. These words made Leelah hate herself. Leelah came out to her friends at school and the reaction from her friends was positive. Leelah's parents ultimately took her out of school because they felt that Leelah

was attacking their image. Leelah felt like an embarrassment to them. Leelah took her own life when she was deprived of living her truth.

The reason I know that all of the things I just said are true is because Leelah left a letter to be read after she died that made all of these disclosures. She also said that “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.”

Please put an end to this madness and ensure that this legislation advances no further. Thank you.