

Testimony: Opposition for House Bill 454

Katherine (Kat) Steiner

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Chairperson Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee.

My name is Kat Steiner and my pronouns are she and her. I live in Fairfax, Ohio, which is a conservative suburb of Cincinnati. Professionally, I've worked in nonprofit leadership and am a fundraising executive. I sit on numerous local boards, identify as Catholic, and was selected as a YWCA Rising Star in 2020. Personally, I am a dedicated biological mom of one transgender daughter, Cass Steiner, who is 15 years old and I have two bonus children in their 20s. I've been the custodial parent of Cass since she was 5 years old and I've sat through more school plays and soccer games than I can count. Like so many parents, I've sacrificed my body, relationships, finances, and my own happiness at times for the love of my child who is my world.

I am strongly opposed to House Bill 454, banning gender affirming healthcare for minors.

My transgender teen came out in April 2022 and we made local, state, and national news in October when she became the first transgender homecoming princess at her high school. She is an outgoing, popular sophomore who's involved with school clubs, plays, and a club soccer team. This summer she worked as a lifeguard and, like many 15 year olds, we talk about getting her driver's license and a job. She's on the honor roll and loves family, especially her grandparents, who live in Preble County where I grew up.

The 6 months before Cass came out as transgender was the scariest time in my life. My child was crippled by panic attacks, depression, and severe anxiety to the point where we could not go to the grocery store or restaurants. There was suicidal ideation and all of the medication, knives, and dangerous objects had to be removed from my home because they were a temptation for harm. There was self-harm, which breaks my heart. Visible, bloody, open wounds and scabs that she intentionally inflicted were on her body. My child was removed from classrooms, like chemistry and engineering, because my baby wanted to hurt herself with the exacto knife, chemicals, and protractor. Anger filled my once loving home and my kid was failing core classes that were previously aced.

I lost my child for those 6 months. I sought help through the guidance counselor and pediatrician because nothing I was doing at home was fixing the anger and pain.. I got my child into therapy right away. The thought of losing my child still brings tears to my eyes and now I know that this is how her gender dysphoria manifested.

Cass' guidance counselor, therapist, pediatrician, and close friends knew that she identified as transgender before I did. I raised my child solo since she was 6 years old and we are close, but she was fearful to tell me. Afraid to disappoint me, unknowing if my love would change, and uncertain if I would reject her because of my faith. My child was not naive to the transphobia

that exists in this world and when I ask her why she didn't tell me sooner she says, "Didn't you ever have a scary secret that you didn't want to tell anyone?" And, I have had secrets. Who hasn't.

The professionals - the guidance counselor, therapist, and pediatrician - who helped her come out to me literally saved Cassie's life and I am forever indebted to them. These are the people who my child felt the most safe with and they are the ones who literally helped keep her alive until she found the courage to come out. I look at these living heroes with sheer gratitude and consider others in their profession in relation to HB 454. Suicide and homelessness are grim realities for trans youth and this bill would mean more of it.

Fast forward to today, Cass is healthy and looks towards the future. She has the medical care, resources, and support that she needs to live her best life as a trans woman. Trans women, like biological females, have specific healthcare needs to their bodies and this is a simple fact. Health is holistic. Cass feels in control and her life is filled with people who see her for who she truly is and wants to be - at home, school, and in the doctor's office.

House Bill 454 means that the government would change our reality. It means that the healthcare my daughter needs to thrive - and survive - would not be available. It is hard for me to imagine having to tell my child that the life she wants is on pause because government officials do not trust me or her with decisions about her wellbeing. With transparency, I am fearful this would cause a setback in our own home and the idea of regressing is unbearable.

HB 454 would eliminate safe spaces entirely. It leaves me asking: who would have been there for my child and what would have happened? You do not have to understand the complexity of being a trans person to know that self-hatred, loathing, and depression have deadly consequences. Nor do you have to be the parent of a trans child to understand that the thought of losing a child to suicide - or even having your child on a path of self-destruction - is gutwrenching to its core.

Respectfully, I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this dangerous bill. Think of me and think of my daughter Cass before making this decision. Please understand what it would mean to deny gender affirming healthcare and how implementing HB 454 could have deadly implications for trans youth, like Cass.