

Good morning Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, and members of the Families, Aging, and, Human Services Committee,

My name is Pat Gleydura. I use They/Them pronouns. I am a nonbinary adult who was born and raised in the city of Cleveland, and I am more than proud to be a two time alum from The Ohio State University. I love the Buckeye State, and have dedicated my professional career to advocating for Ohio's youth as a Licensed Social Worker. I want you to know that LGBTQ+ folks love Ohio, even when Ohio's elected officials fail to love us.

Today I testify as a representative of Honesty for Ohio Education. Honesty for Ohio Education is a nonpartisan, statewide coalition of more than 50 organizations. We champion honesty in education, the empowerment of students, families and educators, and the affirmation of identities, cultures, and experiences. We believe every child deserves an honest, high-quality education grounded in truth, facts, and diverse perspectives, regardless of background, race, or zip code. We strongly denounce and oppose HB 454, Representative Click's attempt to introduce in Ohio a bill written by an outside think tank that prioritizes the culture wars over kids.

I was a substitute teacher before I earned my social work license and became a full time youth advocate. I have had the privilege of working in some of Ohio's amazing public schools. I have always made an effort to connect with students, no matter how briefly I was going to be in their classroom. I would wear a pride wristband often so students knew there was an ally in the building. I will never forget when one student decided to let me know of their trans identity, and asked that I call them by their real name, not the one written on the attendance sheet. Witnessing the peace and joy in their expression when that request was met with understanding was humbling. Using someone's correct name is an incredibly small gesture, just seeing a student for who they are, with all of their unique potential. That gesture meant the world to that student, and to me. I went home and cried that day, because I was so happy to witness that student feeling courage and safety in a way that I did not feel at that age. It felt like the kid I used to be was able to help manifest joy for a young person. HB 454 is a violent and discriminatory reaction to the journey of young people who are working to find themselves, express their identity, and cultivate their own joy. Instead of encouraging each student to learn about themselves, I see this committee trying to rip courage, safety, and identity away from our kids in order to score political points.

In my work with students I have discussed HB 454 with them. I have been asked about the bill and what it means; I have been asked what would happen if it were to be enacted into law. The number one question I get is, why? Why does the Ohio legislature want to do this to me? To my friends? To my family? Why would they do this instead of tackling the issues I actually need help with, like bullying, mental health, or how I am going to pay for college? I never have an answer to these questions. It is hard for me to rationalize. I would like to think all of the legislators at the Statehouse want to better the lives of ALL Ohioans. But having read this legislation, it appears as though some of you feel that some of your constituents deserve cruelty over understanding. Supporting this bill means supporting the removal of resources from Ohio's most vulnerable kids.

If HB 454 were to pass, it would devastate gender-diverse youth in Ohio. Gender-diverse youth often experience disruptive symptoms that immediately impact mental and physical health, including gender dysphoria. Gender affirming healthcare of all kinds is unequivocally life saving.

Gender affirming healthcare is an evidence based practice that is supported by the American Academy of Pediatricians, the Endocrine Society, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the American Psychiatric Association. Evidence based practices are practices that are rigorously reviewed by specialists, taking into account scientific evidence to adjust, modify, and perfect medical and psychological interventions. Declaring a practice evidence-based is not something these well regarded and highly esteemed organizations take lightly, and demonstrates how necessary and critical this type of care is.

While this bill is full of horrific ideas and language, the part I find most troubling as a social worker and someone who works with youth is the stipulation that educators must immediately disclose a student's identity whenever a student might offer that knowledge to anyone in school. Coming out is an incredibly personal process, and each individual deserves to be in complete control of their own process. Often, asking to go by a nickname or alternate pronouns is an early step toward better self understanding. And let me be clear, that is all a student would be asking for in a school setting. Regardless of the shameful fear mongering that this bill's authors and proponents have attempted, there is no school-to-doctor pipeline where your kid can access medical care without you. It is already state law that kids cannot access gender affirming care without the explicit consent of their family. Hateful rhetoric has led to many wrong ideas being circulated. And next, this same hate will put kids in danger.

According to the National Conference of State Legislators, LGBTQ youth are at more than double the risk of being homeless than non-LGBTQ+ youth. Approximately 1.68 million LGBTQ+ youth are homeless. The National Network for Youth reports that this disproportionate representation of LGBTQ+ youth is primarily because of family conflict derived from non-acceptance of a child's LGBTQ+ identity. If a student wants to keep their LGBTQ+ identity confidential, it is for a good reason.

This bill creates a no-confidence, no-trust scenario between students, educators, and families. Students must be able to know that they are safe at school. Educators must be empowered to adhere to the professional standards that already guide interactions with students. School is a place not only to learn, but to belong. I want every student to feel loved, accepted, and shepherded toward their own bright future during their educational journey.

House Bill 454 will hurt students, educators, and families. I urge you to vote no on this bill.