

## Written Testimony for HB 454, Avery Anderson

My name is Avery Anderson, and I live in Columbus, Ohio. I am a 29-year-old PhD student in the College of Nursing at The Ohio State University. I just graduated with my MS from OSU this May. My background is in psychiatric mental health nursing at Nationwide Children's Hospital, and I am currently working there as an Education Nurse Specialist. I have a bachelor's degree in psychology with a concentration in neuroscience from Kenyon College (Gambier, OH) and an accelerated bachelor's degree in nursing from Duke University. When I'm not working or studying, I love mountain biking through alum creek and the quarry trails, and on Sunday mornings you can find me at Central City Church in Grandview Heights. I am approaching the end of my PhD program and exploring where to begin my career as a nurse scientist. Though having been based and settled in Ohio now for many years, the current anti-transgender legislation makes staying here a much less desirable option.

I am writing to oppose HB 454 because my experiences in education, clinical practice and research have all demonstrated robust support for gender-affirming health care. I have seen, first-hand, gender-affirming care provided to youth, and the positive outcomes that follow. I have seen this care literally save youth lives. Gender-affirming care is held to a high ethical and clinical standard of practice. It does not assume the immediate need of medical intervention and certainly not irreversible intervention. Instead, it involves a thorough, comprehensive evaluation of both the patient and family's needs, the patient's developmental status physically, mentally, and emotionally, and a collaborative approach to the safest treatment. The goal of care is health and well-being. The collaborative, patient- and family-centered, and evidence-based approach to treatment is a perfect example of high-quality health care that all areas should strive to achieve. I have also seen, first-hand, the devastating consequences of intolerance and inability to access such care for transgender and gender diverse youth. These consequences involve psychiatric crises and admissions to inpatient psychiatric units to ensure safety. Too many times, children and teens came onto my unit in the hospital following a suicide attempt because the environments and/or adult figures around them invalidated, ostracized, rejected, bullied, and sometimes emotionally or physically abused these kids. These are kids who are appropriately developing and identifying who they are. In no circumstance should it be acceptable for legislation to permit, even encourage, bullying of youth nor should legislation ever be able to ban life-saving health care. As adults, parents, caregivers, family members, idols, figures of authority – it is our responsibility to care for and support youth. We are obligated to foster and maintain their health and well-being. This legislation, HB 454, does exactly the opposite – it provides permission to harm youth and their families. And it will affect all youth. Are you willing to stand behind imposing harm on our children? Do you want the legacy you leave behind to your children to be rooted in exclusion, hatred, harm and oppression?

I am a transgender man, myself. I did not come out or pursue transitioning until young adulthood which has its share of cumbersome challenges. Had I been able to access gender-affirming care as a child or teen, it is likely I could have saved myself mental health battles that I buried deep inside for far too long – until I couldn't bare the pain anymore. My journey encountered a crux of life or death. And what gave me hope for a tomorrow was the possibility of one day living as who I knew I was – which meant accessing gender-affirming health care. Likewise, having these resources available earlier could have saved my family a tremendous amount of hardship in having to alter and reconstruct their vision of me and expectations for my future after two decades of thinking otherwise. Had we all been able to partake in the thorough evaluation by a gender-affirming provider early on, we could have built the skills to communicate earlier about gender, appropriately explore what it means for me and my family, and we

could have all been able to move forward together, united in goals and treatment plans, to make decisions that best supported my mental and physical health. I never want any child to be brought to point of facing no other option but escape from life because of the pain imposed upon them by others.

Please, think about how harmful this legislation will be – I can promise you I have seen consequences of unacceptance, and no one can possibly want that for their own children or their family members or their friends or their loved ones.

Please, I urge you to oppose HB 454. And in doing so we can set the example of how to love thy neighbor – and let that be the legacy we teach our children.

Sincerest regards,

Avery Anderson