

Amy Demlow

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee, thank you for this opportunity to voice my opposition to House Bill 454.

My name is Amy Demlow and I am the parent of a transgender man. My son came out to my husband and I when he was in high school, although in hindsight there were signs from an early age. Aaron had always desired to keep his hair short and dress in boy clothing. When he came out it was not necessarily a surprise but obviously a bit concerning as this was new territory that we had to learn as parents. We didn't have any friends or family with transgender members, but we were lucky enough to find a local LGBTQ group which included other parents of transgender children. Not only was that group a lifesaver for us, the coming out and ability to get affirming health care was a lifesaver for Aaron.

I can't express to you how important gender affirming healthcare is to these kids and how dangerous this bill is to families like ours. I am concerned that the voices of parents supporting their children are being completely ignored in this proposed legislation. This bill restricts parents from having the ability to make decisions that are in the best interest of their child. Parents of trans kids do not make any decision lightly; this is a journey walked in consultation with counselors, psychologists, and medical providers that families rely on and respect. Instead of deferring to the parents and medical team that knows their child (and patient) the best, this law would strip the rights away from parents, putting their child and quite frankly the entire family in harm's way. The mental health effects on trans youth should be of great concern to the committee. Parents want to provide stability for their kids and give them the best chance to succeed and have a happy childhood. There are numerous studies conducted by gender clinics, groups from the American Medical Association and the Endocrine Society, ALL of which conclude that efforts to ban gender-affirming care for transgender and gender diverse youth are danger and will lead to adverse mental health outcomes. My son's depression and suicidal ideation were terrifying for our family – we cannot put families in crisis by stripping away their rights to access affirming medical care.

I also note that part of this bill would require school systems to report to parents any students "social" nonconformity or be called by a different name that essentially "outs" a child before they may feel ready to discuss how they feel with their family. This is absolutely normal from any adolescent perspective. There is a higher incidence of the homeless LGBTQ population than normal adolescent population. These LGBTQ teens are smart to consider whether they could be kicked out of their house or disassociated as a part of communicating with their families. It is noted that many LGBTQ teens do eventually share their feelings with their family. But it is done on their terms and on their timeline.

In direct response to the proponents of this bill who expose that "parents have a right to know, I ask, you want parents to know, but you want to eliminate the ability to consult and assist that child from an affirming medical standpoint.

For the sake of all families, including those with young trans people in Ohio just like mine, I beg you: please don't pass this dangerous, discriminatory bill. I urge you to oppose HB 454 to protect our state's youth and their parents.