

Jessica Sherman (she/her), RN, MSN, FNP-BC
Opponent
House Bill 454
Ohio House Family, Aging & Human Services Committee

Chairman Manchester, Vice Chair Al Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Family, Aging & Human Services Committee. My name is Jessica Sherman, and I am a nurse practitioner and PhD student in Columbus, Ohio. I am providing testimony in strong opposition to House Bill 454 on behalf of myself as an Ohioan, as a nurse practitioner that cares for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, and as a PhD student whose research focuses on health equity with an emphasis on gender and sexual minorities.

For the past 7 years, I worked in a community-based clinic providing primary care and gender affirming services to transgender and gender diverse individuals. In this role I saw first-hand how denying evidence based medical treatment for gender dysphoria contributes to significant psychological distress and puts people's lives at risk. Research tells us transgender, and gender diverse individuals experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, suicide, and substance use disorder. These negative mental health outcomes are the direct consequences of discrimination, mistreatment, and denial of medical care.¹ This is consistent with what I saw in my practice. All my patients thrived when provided with scientifically sound and appropriate medical treatment for gender dysphoria in a safe and affirming environment. The difference providing gender affirming care made in their lives and the impact it had on their physical and mental health was unprecedented. HB454 will not save the lives of children, in fact it puts their lives at risk. By denying youth access to lifesaving medical care, you are placing them at risk for violence, depression, suicide, substance abuse, and poor physical health. I am confident that this bill will result in the death of transgender and gender diverse youth.

Legislating the patient-provider relationship will only fuel mistrust, discrimination and mistreatment of transgender youth within the healthcare system. This will have devastating long-term effects on physical and mental health. One of the biggest barriers that I face in providing care is building trust between my patients and the medical establishment. It takes work to convince people that have been invalidated and abused within our healthcare system that we are on their side, with their best interests at heart. Building this trust can be particularly challenging with transgender and gender diverse individuals, as many in this community are harmed by the very systems that are supposed to help keep them healthy. Bills like HB 454 have a damaging effect on this process and make our job much harder.

HB 454 seeks to restrict evidence-based health care for young people and inserts legislators into the relationship between a minor, their guardians, and their medical providers in an unprecedented manner. I am concerned about the messages this bill sends about Ohio's dedicated healthcare providers, the impact it will have on our ability to provide the best care possible to our communities, and its potential impact on our healthcare workforce.

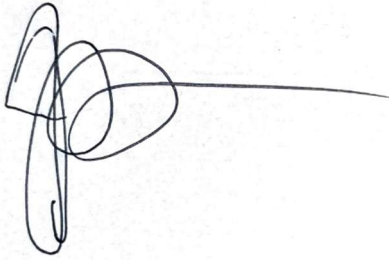
1. The language of this bill insinuates that medical treatment for gender dysphoria is being provided in an unsafe and experimental manner. It also implies that health providers are not doing their due diligence in evaluating the myriad of factors which impact youth who experience gender dysphoria. In previous testimony to this committee, representatives from leading pediatric hospitals in the state have clarified emphatically that this is not the case. Clinical practice guidelines from the Endocrine Society, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the

World Professional Association for Transgender Health recommend that adolescents diagnosed with gender dysphoria receive mental healthcare prior to and concurrent with any pharmacologic treatment.²⁻⁴

2. As a clinician I am deeply concerned that this bill would force Ohio's providers to decide between violating their ethical duty to provide the best care possible patients and losing their license. If this bill passes, many providers, me included, will be incentivized to practice elsewhere, which would perpetuate healthcare shortages throughout the state. Amidst an epidemic of youth mental health concerns, along with our state's abysmal infant/maternal mortality rates and addiction crisis, this committee should be prioritizing efforts to keep clinicians in this state.

I strongly urge you to vote against this bill which will cause undue harm to transgender and gender diverse youth, their families, medical providers in Ohio, and all Ohio citizens. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal line extending to the right.

References

1. Cicero EC, Reisner SL, Silva SG, Merwin EI, Humphreys JC. Health Care Experiences of Transgender Adults. *Advances in Nursing Science*. 2019-04-01 2019;42(2):123-138. doi:10.1097/ans.0000000000000256
2. Jason Rafferty, COMMITTEE ON PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH, COMMITTEE ON ADOLESCENCE, SECTION ON LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER HEALTH AND WELLNESS, Michael Yogman, Rebecca Baum, Thresia B. Gambon, Arthur Lavin, Gerri Mattson, Lawrence Sagin Wissow, Cora Breuner, Elizabeth M. Alderman, Laura K. Grubb, Makia E. Powers, Krishna Upadhya, Stephenie B. Wallace, Lynn Hunt, Anne Teresa Gearhart, Christopher Harris, Kathryn Melland Lowe, Chadwick Taylor Rodgers, Ilana Michelle Sherer; Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children and Adolescents. *Pediatrics* October 2018; 142 (4): e20182162. 10.1542/peds.2018-2162
3. Endocrine Society. Practice guidelines: Methodology. Accessed May 25, 2022. Available at <https://www.endocrine.org/clinical-practice-guidelines/methodology>.
4. World Professional Association for Transgender Health. *Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People*. 7th ed. Minneapolis, MN: World Professional Association for Transgender Health; 2011 Available at: <https://www.wpath.org/publications/soc>. Accessed April 15, 2018