

Gabriel Lee
Opponent
House Bill 454
Ohio House Family, Aging & Human Services Committee

Good Morning Chairman Manchester, Vice Chair Al Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson, and Members of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee. My name is Gabriel Lee, I use He/They Pronouns, and I am an undergraduate student in Columbus, Ohio. I am providing testimony in staunch opposition to House Bill 454 on behalf of myself as an Ohioan, an LGBT+ community organizer, and a future physician.

As a crisis counselor for the Trevor Project, a youth suicide and crisis hotline, I have seen how LGBTQIA2+ youth live in the world. I have worked with a wide array of youth, attending to over 250 cases in my time volunteering. You are already aware of the disproportionate rates of homelessness, sexual and physical violence, housing instability, substance use, substance use disorders, and high-risk sexual behaviors amongst the disproportionate rates of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, self-harm, body dysphoria, and suicide¹. These rates are even higher amongst the youth who identify as transgender and gender non-conforming.

With this in mind, it is pertinent that Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming youth have options to affirm their identities and live authentically. We know that youth experiencing gender dysphoria may need more than just mental health care to feel the support they deserve. Therefore, it is essential that LGBTQIA2+ youth have access to all the treatments that they and their medical care teams believe are in their best interest, including the medical interventions and actions that Bill 454 aims to restrict.

HB 454 aims to restrict evidence-based healthcare options for young people while putting this same population in unsafe positions mentally and physically. I am deeply concerned about the messages this bill sends about Ohio's healthcare providers, the impact this will have on the LGBTQIA2+ youth of Ohio, and its impact on our ability to provide care for our communities.

First, this bill aims to restrict gender affirming treatment options including options such as top and bottom surgery and hormone treatment. Restricting the ability for youth to obtain these procedures is incredibly harmful as many of these treatments are life

¹ Homelessness and housing instability among LGBTQ youth. The Trevor Project. (2022, February 2). Retrieved November 14, 2022, from <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/>

saving and affirming. I've worked with many youth who self harm, do high risk behaviors such as improper bindings of their chest, and take their lives because they are unable to obtain gender affirming care as a result of financial constraints and family. For individuals that are able to obtain this level of care, their lives improve greatly as they are able to live more authentically themselves². Removing this option will force youth to wait to obtain this treatment until they are 18; however, some transgender and gender non-conforming youth will take their lives well before they are 18 because of the inability to obtain gender affirming care among other issues. Regardless of the other points presented on the floor today, you should vote in opposition of this bill on the basis that the services the bill aims to prohibit are services that save lives.

Second, I take issue with Section 3129.05, subclauses A and B in which, for brevity, you are mandating that schools give out children to their parents. Not only is this incredibly immoral, but it will quite literally kill queer kids. Research shows that suicide happens for LGBT+ youth as a result of issues like bullying and family rejection³. Mandating that schools reveal private information about students when they may simply not be ready will increase rates of LGBT+ youth suicide. This bill could cause hundreds of children to take their lives. I urge you not to pass it for the lives of thousands of young queer kids in Ohio.

Third, I take issue with the phrasing of the bill - framing gender affirming care as a service that does not save lives and does not help the mental state of transgender and gender non-conforming youth. Not only is this simply not true, but it sets a precedent that these services are unimportant. The wording is incredibly harmful and problematic and will affect future decisions about this community as a result.

This community needs to be supported. This community deserves to thrive. They deserve the resources and the treatment to be authentically themselves. Their families deserve access to the options to support their children with love. While this bill is called the SAFE Act, it does everything but keep our children safe. Thus, I urge you to vote in opposition of this bill and thank you for your time and consideration.

² *Gender-affirming care saves lives*. Columbia University Department of Psychiatry. (2022, March 30). Retrieved November 14, 2022, from <https://www.columbiapsychiatry.org/news/gender-affirming-care-saves-lives>

³ *Lesbian, bisexual, gay and Transgender Youth and suicide*. Western Michigan University. (2015, December 16). Retrieved November 14, 2022, from <https://wmich.edu/suicideprevention/lgbt>