



Written Opponent Testimony – House Bill 454
Janet Shaw, Executive Director
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The Ohio House Families, Aging and Human Services Committee
Nov. 16, 2022

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson and Members of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee, as Executive Director of the Ohio Psychiatric Physicians Association (OPPA), a statewide medical specialty organization, representing more than 1,000 physicians who specialize in diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental illnesses, including substance use disorders, in children, adolescents and adults, I provide this written testimony on behalf of OPPA in opposition to House Bill 454.

The OPPA is committed to advocating for the mental health needs of all individuals, including individuals with Gender Dysphoria and their families. Gender Dysphoria is a diagnosis that is given to individuals who experience clinically significant distress associated with a persisting incongruence between their experienced and born gender that can manifest in a number of ways (DSM-5). Individuals with Gender Dysphoria very commonly experience mental health comorbidities, including anxiety and depression, and they experience suicidal thinking at a substantially higher rate than individuals without Gender Dysphoria. Transgender individuals often endure social stigmatization and discrimination which negatively impacts self-esteem and worsens mental health issues.¹

Gender-affirming care is critical in the treatment of individuals with Gender Dysphoria. It improves mental health outcomes. Gender-affirming care refers to a range of interventions that aim to support and affirm an individual's gender identity (World Health Organization). It ranges from therapy to understanding gender identity, from social interventions, to medical interventions. Researchers from Princeton recently found that less than 8% of youth who make social gender transitions go back to living as their born gender.² A study of over 6,700 clients treated in a transgender clinic in Amsterdam over a period of more than 40-years showed that less than 1% of individuals who had gender-affirming surgical interventions regretted their choices.³ Blocking access to timely gender-affirming care has been shown to increase youths' risk for negative mental health outcomes, including suicide.

HB 454, if passed, would prevent patients with Gender Dysphoria from accessing effective mental health treatment and for this reason, the OPPA opposes it. As psychiatrists we know that we must treat all co-occurring disorders when we treat patients, and treating anxiety or depression, or any other mental health issue, in a patient with Gender Dysphoria, while ignoring their need for gender-affirming care, will not be effective.

¹ American Psychiatric Association. (Reviewed August 2022) *What is Gender Dysphoria?*
<https://psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria>

² Olson KR, Durwood L, Horton R, Gallagher NM, Devor A. Gender identity 5 years after social transition. *Pediatrics*. 2022; <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2021-056082>

³ Wiepjes, C. M., Nota, N. M., de Blok, C., Klaver, M., de Vries, A., Wensing-Kruger, S. A., de Jongh, R. T., Bouman, M. B., Steensma, T. D., Cohen-Kettenis, P., Gooren, L., Kreukels, B., & den Heijer, M. (2018). The Amsterdam Cohort of Gender Dysphoria Study (1972-2015): Trends in Prevalence, Treatment, and Regrets. *The journal of sexual medicine*, 15(4), 582–590. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2018.01.016>

Additionally, we do not believe that anyone should be prevented from accessing gender-affirming treatments provided according to best practices defined by medical experts in the field. We stand with our medical colleagues in the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists (AACAP) who have official position statements supporting provision of gender-affirming care to children and adolescents, and oppose legislation that blocks access to medical and surgical interventions.^{4 5}

The transgender population endures unique health challenges that may be compounded by anti-transgender policies. Legislation that denies transgender youth access to gender-affirming care exposes vulnerable youth to marginalization, exacerbates existing health disparities, facilitates risky behaviors, and leads to preventable deaths. The Ohio Psychiatric Physicians Association (OPPA) strongly opposes any efforts - legal, legislative, and otherwise - to block access to these critical mental health and medical interventions for this vulnerable population.

Thank you for the consideration of our remarks and as always please feel free to reach out with any questions.

⁴ Wyckoff, Alyson Sulaski. (2022, January 6). *AAP continues to support care of transgender youths as more states push restrictions*. American Academy of Pediatrics, *AAP News*.

<https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/19021/AAP-continues-to-support-care-of-transgender>

⁵ American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. (2019, November 8). *AACAP Statement Responding to Efforts to ban Evidence-Based Care for Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth*.

https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Latest_News/AACAP_Statement_Responding_to_Efforts-to_ban_Evidence-Based_Care_for_Transgender_and_Gender_Diverse.aspx