

Chairperson Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Stuart Brown. I am a resident of Milford, Clermont County, Ohio and I am strongly opposed to House Bill 454, banning gender affirming healthcare for minors.

I am a 52 year-old straight cisgender man. I am married with two children; a lawyer by education and training. My children are cisgender, as is my wife. My identity as a straight cisgender heterosexual professional male means that I look, talk, act, and think like many Ohioans and likely many of your constituents.

I have a very personal story to tell you about why I have come to believe that House Bill 454 is exceptionally dangerous legislation.

Last fall my high school aged son was asked to attend a birthday party of a classmate. This classmate was a friend of my son's, but not a close friend to the degree that we had ever interacted with them.

After attending the birthday party, my son was shaken by what he had experienced while there. He related how uncomfortable it was in the home since it seemed that everything that was said to his friend was harmful, hurtful, or demeaning. His friend is transgender and their home was not a supportive one.

Some weeks after that birthday party my son mentioned that his friend was in extreme distress and fear. His friend's home life had gone from difficult to impossible. From unsupportive to unsafe. His friend begged for any place to go to be safe. As I sit before you today I have no doubt that harm would have come to that child. Harm from their family directed at him or harm to himself because he simply could not take the pressure any more.

We took him into our home with no notice other than a text from our son saying his friend was desperate after having a terrible altercation at home that morning. He asked if he could bring his friend home that evening to keep him safe. We agreed to welcome this child who was a stranger to us. He arrived on our doorstep with dark circles under his sunken eyes that January night. He stood in our foyer with slumped shoulders holding a small grocery bag of clothing, a stuffed animal, and nothing else. This was the extent of what he had taken from his idyllic suburban home. We offered what we thought was a cooling off period. That cooling off period never ended. We gave him shelter, food, encouragement and a soft place to land. But we are not his parents. Nor did we try to be his parents. We tried to offer a safe zone for a child who needed safety.

House Bill 454 affects my peace of mind because I know that it would have had an exceptionally detrimental effect on the kid who came to live with my family and would severely and negatively impact others who are similarly situated.

First, when this kid came to our house they were, at best, malnourished and, at worst, anorexic. Within the first four hours of his residence in our home it became clear that they had chosen to simply not eat. Eating, you see, would lead to growth, and growth could lead to development and development could lead to effects of puberty that this child was not willing or ready to face.

I question why the General Assembly is asserting itself into healthcare decisions. House Bill 454 refers to treatments such as gender blockers as being 'experimental' but I think that betrays the very real issues being faced by these kids. The child that we brought into our home had no access to gender affirming care. He had a family who would not allow him to speak to doctors about gender issues at all including threatening him with harm if he disclosed those issues as part of his reasons for starving himself and self-mutilation. So, what did he do? He self-medicated by further starving and cutting himself.

I submit to you that if you vote to take tools out of a medical provider's toolbox, many of these children will find substitute tools that are absolutely dangerous. Tools like anorexia or bulimia, tools like self-harm. This bill, if enacted will codify desperation for trans youth.

Medical providers have standards of practice, rules of professional ethics, and liability considerations. In other words, if a medical provider's services to a transgender child, or any child, amount to malpractice then there are repercussions. I submit to you that there will be situations facing medical providers where they will know that a child is resorting to self-harm or eating disorders and they will know that the child is doing so because of gender issues. Removing a doctor's ability to address the whole issue with all of the possible alternatives for treatment WILL CAUSE HARM. I REPEAT THAT THIS BILL WILL CODIFY DESPERATION AMONG OUR TRANS YOUTH.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote **NO** on this dangerous bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

I will now take any questions you may have.