

## **Kate Gillooly**

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.

I am the proud mother of 2 amazing young men. Our younger son was a happy, confident child, always ready to make friends and have adventures (We thought at the time that he was a girl.) When he hit puberty, he became a different person - withdrawn, moody, depressed. We took him to a therapist, but it didn't seem to help. His condition worsened until he was suffering from suicidal ideation - thoughts of killing himself entered his head at all times. He obsessed over how to do it and when to do it. His friends warned us of his depression. We finally took him for an assessment - the mental health professional told me to drive him directly to the hospital and have him admitted to the adolescent psych ward. He had just turned 13. After a week in the hospital and months of excellent therapy and psychiatric work, he finally realized that he was suffering from dysphoria - he identified as male and was trapped in a female body. He came out as transgender, to us, his friends and then to his school and church. He has continued with mental health therapy, changed his name, and taken steps toward gender affirming medical therapy. He is back to his brave, happy, helpful self, and is seen as a compassionate leader among his peers and by his teachers and leaders. We got our child back by learning how to support his identity as a male. He had support to make his way through. Far too many people, especially children and youth, do not have the support they need for such momentous change. Family members, doctors, therapists, school systems, and our culture in general add to a person's mental health burden when they don't listen, learn, and take people seriously when they speak their truth. Too many youth and young adults die by suicide, convinced there is something wrong with themselves that no one can fix. I urge you to allow family members, medical professionals, and school systems to do what they know best - how to nurture and support and love people for who they are. Please vote no on this dangerous bill.

I urge you to oppose HB 454 and protect our state's youth.