

Julie Gill

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. My son has been benefiting from gender-affirming care at Nationwide Children's Hospital for almost two years now. Before he started his journey in gender-affirming care, he had transformed from an active child who liked karate, video games, and spending time with loved ones, to a troubled young adult completely withdrawn from his family and nearly everything he enjoyed. We knew something was deeply wrong, but he was not yet able to communicate his feelings, and we didn't know how to help him. After some time, he came forward to us to confide that he is transgender. Furthermore, he confided that coming to this realization had been a struggle accompanied by recurring nightmares and serious thoughts of suicide – something no parent ever wants to hear from their child. We sought expert help for him right away in hopes that with treatment and guidance, he could flourish as whoever he wanted to be. He entered therapy, and we got him on the wait-list for the THRIVE Program at Nationwide Children's Hospital. After regularly consulting with a doctor, and in combination with a therapist at Syntero, his depression started to lift like clouds after a storm. He thinks and talks about the future now, and what it might have in store for him. He has plans to learn a trade. He is growing into himself and becoming comfortable with his abilities, his potential, and his identity. It's an incredible relief to him and to us.

But now, the news of HB 454 threatens this progress, and the wellbeing of my child. If HB 454 passes, my son will lose access to the doctors, counselors, and treatment that helped him see the value of life and the value within himself. We are terrified that if professionals are penalized for providing the care that is keeping my son happy and safe, and the THRIVE Program is taken away from him, he will lose the strides he's made against the darkness that almost overtook him, and he would be taken away from us. We cannot let our son become another tragic statistic of a transgender life ended before it had a chance to begin.

What must be understood by these legislators is that the next time my child or anyone's child has suicidal thoughts, they might go through with them. It is up to the adults to be caring and responsible, and do all in their power to prevent that. This includes ensuring access to gender-affirming care to youth who need it. A robust body of research shows that access to gender-affirming care, which is widely endorsed by pediatricians, greatly improves transgender youth's mental health and wellbeing. By taking it away, HB 454 would hurt my son and other transgender children in ways that no child should ever suffer, and no parent should ever endure. With the help of the doctors and nurses of the THRIVE Program at Nationwide Children's Hospital, my son has a bright outlook on life again. I beg you not to take that away from him. Please, as you may live your life as you choose and pursue your own safety and happiness, let him do the same. I urge you to vote no on HB 454.