

Testimony on HB 454

Families, Aging and Human Services Committee

November 16, 2022

Submitted by Cathi Kulik

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today in opposition to HB 454. My name is Cathi Kulik. I am a life-long Ohio resident, currently living in Westerville. I'm a wife, a mother, a soon-to-be grandmother and a retired teacher from the Olentangy Local School District. I have no children in my immediate family who will be impacted by this bill, but I have former students, and I have friends whose children will be denied appropriate medical care if this bill passes, so here I am.

My first objection to this bill. It says that, "The state has a compelling interest in protecting the health and safety of its citizens." Do you actually think that you, legislators, have more of an interest in the health and safety of individual children than the parents of those individual children? That you know the needs of individual children better than their parents? You are more knowledgeable than parents? We hear a lot about parental rights, the right to choose what book a child does or does not read, the right to choose what school a child attends, but a parent doesn't have the right to make medical decisions for his or her child?

There seems to be a lot of concern about the potential for suicide among transgender youth, and I share your concern. I serve on the Delaware County Suicide Prevention Coalition, so I have some knowledge on this topic. Suicide risk exists and is elevated for youth who do not have access to healthcare providers with expertise in caring for youth who identify as transgender. This is affirmed through studies by the American Psychiatric Association (2008, 2012, 2015), the Transgender Pediatric and Adolescent Health Program at Boston Children's Hospital, the

Journal of the American Medical Association (Turban, 2020) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (2015). So, according to the medical experts, suicide risk is elevated when transgender youth are denied gender affirming care, as this bill does, not when they have access to it.

With regard to care, you seem to have concerns that gender-affirming surgery be withheld until the age of 18. You can definitely relax on that point, as the standard of care calls for surgery as a possibility after a youth has reached the age of eighteen. This is from the GeMS program at Boston Children's Hospital, a Reuter's report, the Endocrine Society, the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, Nationwide Children's Hospital here in Columbus, Cincinnati Children's Hospital, and Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital (part of the University Hospital System) in Cleveland. Three of the major children's hospitals in Ohio follow the standard of care prescribed by the experts in the field, so the gender-affirming surgery that you talk about in this bill is not the standard of care for young people under the age of eighteen, according to my experts. I'm interested to know who your sources are that say otherwise, and I hope you will address this.

From my reading of this bill, you are willing to accept that a 15-year-old whose sex at birth was assigned as female and who identifies as female is capable of deciding that she is female. And you are willing to accept that a 15-year-old whose sex at birth was assigned as male and who identifies as male is capable of deciding that he is male. But you won't accept that a 15-year-old whose sex at birth was assigned as male but identifies as female is capable of making that decision. Either gender identity is fixed at a certain age, or it isn't.

There is so much about the intent of this bill that I do not understand because every piece of scientifically verifiable data proves this bill will hurt already-marginalized young people. It's hard not to conclude that the Save Adolescents from Experimentation Act is exposing our

children to exactly that – experimentation. Medically unproven care. I fail to see how this protects the health and safety of our most vulnerable.

I'm happy to take any questions.