

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Committee on Families, Aging, and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 454, the so-called "SAFE Act."

My name is Robert Chaloupka. I'm an attorney from Seven Hills, Ohio, with my own estate planning practice, a wife, a mortgage, two cats, and most importantly, a 6-year-old daughter whom I love more than anything else in this world. It's repeated often enough to seem like a cliché, but all of us who are parents know that it's true that you've never known a love like you have for your child. I don't know whether it's simple human instinct, a learned cultural norm, or some combination of all of the above, but it's true that you often feel like your heart is outside your body, and that from that moment on your life has a new purpose – to keep that child safe, happy, and healthy at all costs. I would do anything for my daughter. Anything. And I neither crave nor deserve any credit for that – it's just doing my job as a father, same as I would expect of any other parent.

We've been told that it's that same desire to love and protect our children from harm that drives the effort to pass HB 454. It's even in the carefully-chosen acronym, the "SAFE Act" – Save Adolescents From Experimentation; who could argue with that, right? But wait, who is it that's looking to experiment on our kids? From whom do they need to be "saved"? Well, if you're to believe the sponsors and proponents of this bill, it's the "gender clinics" seeking to profit from what's been called "mutilation," "castration," and "sterilization." That certainly sounds terrible, doesn't it? And, who runs these clinics that are out there torturing and destroying our children's lives?

According to the proponents of this bill, it's the largest children's hospitals in the state. It's Nationwide Children's, Cincinnati Children's, Toledo Children's, Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital in Cleveland ... several of whom were represented in the last hearing this committee held on the bill. Certainly, that's a serious allegation. The primary sponsor of this bill, in his initial testimony back in February that "we're talking about children who will be forever sterile ... children who are going to have double mastectomies, penectomies, penile inversion, things like that that will affect them for the rest of their lives as children." That sounds terrifying, doesn't it? Irreversible surgical procedures performed on children by doctors who are motivated solely by profit? That's something that most folks would demand action to prevent.

And yet, we have no evidence that this is happening in Ohio. Of the approximately 25 witnesses providing testimony in support of this bill, only one so-called "detransitioner" was from Ohio, and they sought care outside of the state of Ohio, at the age of 18. On June 1, this committee heard from several representatives of Ohio's finest children's hospitals, who presented raw data, including the fact that approximately 3,300 children had sought treatment for gender dysphoria in the previous ten years, with approximately 7% of those being prescribed the puberty-blocking drugs at issue in this bill. That's about 230 children, or an average of 23 per year. So, even if we were to believe that gender clinics are solely motivated by profits, you're talking about an incredibly small number of pediatric patients, which would seem to generate a pretty miniscule amount of revenue, particularly for the size of the institutions being accused of hiding their real motivations. I'm not fortunate enough to be a member of this committee, but if I were, I suspect I would be quite skeptical of the attempts to demonize these institutions, both in testimony before this committee and in social media.

So, if we take as a given that there is not some secret conspiracy among Ohio's leading pediatricians to dupe unsuspecting families into accepting what has been described by various witnesses as mutilation, castration, and torture, what do we have left? It would appear we have a bill that seeks to insert the state into the critically important relationship among children, their parents, and their physicians. We have a bill that seeks to promote parental rights . . . but only to the extent that those parents agree with the proponents of this bill. More than a dozen parents testified before this committee – NONE of whom presented evidence that their children were "mutilated" or "castrate" without their consent -- suggesting that their rights to NOT

affirm their children were not respected. And yet, the proposed response is to disregard the rights of those parents who WOULD choose and have chosen to affirm their children.

I mentioned earlier that I'm the father of a 6-year-old girl. My daughter is the sweetest, most fun, intelligent, amazing girl who I have ever met. She's also on the autism spectrum, and over the past 3 years or so, since she was diagnosed, we have had a very close relationship with the local medical community. While my daughter's gender identity has never been an issue, I have no reason to believe that if she were to come to us at some point with a concern about her gender, my wife and I wouldn't respond with the same love and care for her well-being that we have had since the day she was born. If she came to us saying she was transgender, we would respect that as her own experience, and we would work with her doctors, therapists, teachers, and the whole team we've built up over the past few years to determine the best path forward. I strongly feel that the combination of all of those efforts would lead us to the best path forward for her.

And yet, this bill would take that decision out of our hands. HB 454 would force our daughter's school, her doctors, and us as parents to deny her truth, should she tell us she was transgender. To be fair, the bill would tolerate her existence as a trans child, but it would prevent any of us from doing anything meaningful to help her in that journey. I should also point out that it's been suggested several times, both by the bill's sponsor and by several witnesses, that children with so-called comorbidities, including autism, should not be taken seriously when they come out as transgender. As a father who has spent several years, and will likely spend many, many more, advocating for my child's right to be who she is, autism and all, the effort to muddy the waters and paid those with mental illness and/or neurodivergent conditions as somehow "less than" is patently offensive and FAR below the standard one would expect of the Ohio Legislature.

It would be one thing if proposal was motivated by a desire to be cautious when it comes to children who are still forming their identities. If the idea was that transgender people are real – i.e., trans women are, in fact, women – but that facilitating a gender transition through medical and other means for a minor was perhaps too risky to allow on a general basis, that would be one thing. But that's not the stated position of the folks behind this legislation. The bill's primary sponsor confirmed at the first hearing this committee held on the matter that he had been asked to carry this bill by the Center for Christian Virtue. On a recent episode of that group's podcast, the president of that organization stated that acknowledging there being more to sex and gender than a simple male/female binary was "stupid." He went on to suggest that "[w]e have known forever what a boy is and what a girl is," and he directly attacked both the chair of this committee and her mother, suggesting "if they went and walked into a bathroom and there was a naked man there peeing, like they would say 'there's a man in here!' How do they know that? Because you know."

I'll also note a recent Twitter post by the primary sponsor of this bill. In response to a tweet suggesting that "#TransWomenAreWomen," the sponsor of the bill stated, "Actually, they are not. But go ahead and explain your theory about how boys are girls. I find mythology fascinating." That comment came from the same person who testified before this committee that "This bill is not about hate. This bill is about kindness, love, and compassion."

I don't see much kindness in a bill that proposes to put a thumb on the scale of the relationship between parents, their child, and their doctor. I don't see much love in a bill brought by folks who consider it "stupid" to listen to other perspectives and try to develop an inclusive environment for everyone. I don't see much compassion in a bill that would dictate a one-size-fits-all approach to clinical treatment for trans kids, ignoring the judgments of mainstream pediatricians and other experts in favor of an approach endorsed by a small minority who want to impose their judgment on families in radically different circumstances from their own.

We can do better than this for our kids. We should do better. We MUST do better.