

Written Testimony, Ohio HB183

October 11, 2023

Chair Young, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the House Higher Education Committee,

My name is Rachel Ernst Stahlhut and my pronouns are she/her. I'm a proud Cincinnati, a Quaker, and the mother of a transgender eight-year-old. I was raised on the west side of Cincinnati and, when I married a nice guy from Indiana, I brought him back to Ohio with me to build our life together. I strongly oppose House Bill 183, the proposed bill regarding single-sex bathroom access in Ohio schools and universities.

Our child is eight and she just started third grade. She transitioned during kindergarten, during the year that schools were shut down due to Covid. I remember that she would unmute herself during her online kindergarten classes and proudly shout, "I'm a girl!" to her classmates. She was happy to be known as her true self, and has been a confident, smart, independent, sassy little girl since. When I think about a bathroom ban in Ohio and how it would severely limit and endanger my daughter's safety and happiness, on a daily basis, it does not resonate with the kindness, love, and support she has received as a transgender kid by the majority of our community, especially at school. A bathroom ban does not reflect the will of Ohio's voters and does not represent our values as a community that demands safe and inclusive spaces for all Ohio students. It is not who we are.

We are so grateful that our daughter attends a wonderful public Montessori elementary school in Cincinnati. The students at her school are racially and economically diverse. Her classmates were born all over the world and many languages are spoken. Some kids have two moms or two dads. It's a school that prides itself on uplifting and celebrating the cultures and diversity of its student body. In such a beautiful and community-oriented school, this bathroom bill would single out my child and other gender nonconforming students for exclusion, suspicion, and discrimination. This IS NOT the type of community we've all so lovingly fostered in our school. It is not who we are.

House Bill 183 demands that adults and other children interrogate their fellow Ohioans, like my third-grader, about their biological sex when they need to use the bathroom in their elementary schools. Is this who we are as Ohioans, policing each other's access to meet our most basic needs? No, this is not who we are.

Many transgender and nonbinary teenagers struggle with their mental health and for many, school can be a safe place. A bathroom ban would add another layer of stress and "otherness" to the daily life of an already vulnerable population. Does debating and possibly passing a bill that directly harms young people reflect our priorities as a state? Is this who we are? (No, it's not)

The Ohio Constitution declares that all Ohioans have the inalienable right to seek and obtain happiness and safety. A bathroom ban strips our daughter and other transgender Ohioans of this right, invades her privacy, and, in fact, places my child in harm's way. She was recently bullied on the school bus by some children who were told that she "used to be a boy." No child should be harassed with questions about their private anatomy in a school setting, yet HB 183 enshrines this bullying into law. It does not keep my child safe.

You as elected lawmakers are responsible for representing *all* Ohioans. As you consider voting for this bill, I urge you to think about an amazing little girl from Cincinnati, and all of the other young people throughout the state who are living proudly as their authentic selves and want to pee in peace like every other person. I urge you to vote NO on HB 183.