

Opponent Testimony for Higher Education Committee HB 183

Wednesday October 11, 2023

Halle Martin

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony in opposition to House Bill 183 today. I am a cisgender woman. I was formerly a C-suite executive of a public company in the S&P 500. I voted as a Republican for decades until my party abandoned its values to cater to the voting power of the far religious right. And I am the parent of three beautiful daughters, one of whom happens to be transgender.

While this legislation purportedly addresses concerns related to public restrooms and protecting cisgender girls, it is my strong belief that this proposed legislation is actually subterfuge for an anti-transgender campaign being waged for purely political reasons. Viewed in its best light, this proposed legislation is a solution looking for a problem that doesn't exist.

The notion that allowing individuals to use restrooms aligned with their gender identity poses a threat to safety is based on misinformation and fear-mongering. There has been no credible evidence of ANY attacks on cisgender females by transgender females in bathrooms. Law enforcement officials and researchers have debunked the right-wing myth that sexual predators will exploit transgender non-discrimination laws to sneak into women's restrooms.

However, while there is zero evidence to indicate that transgender men pose any kind of threat to cisgender women in public bathrooms, the reverse is not true. The truth is that trans people are victims, rather than perpetrators, of harassment and assault in public restrooms. Rep. Jarrells noted that 36% of transgender people experience sexual assault as a result of bathroom policies. Transgender people are four times more likely to experience violent crime than their cisgender peers. And 77% of transgender K-12 students have had negative experiences in school as a result of being transgender.

On a personal note, I ask the representatives.... Are you or have you been the parent of a twenty-something year-old daughter? Do you actively worry for your daughter's safety when she goes into a restroom in a public place – be it a school or airport or theater or restaurant? Do you watch for her return and intensify your worry after a few minutes? Do you wonder whether she would even tell you if she had a harassing encounter while she was there? Do you resist the urge to accompany her whenever you're together because you know that she has to have her autonomy? I bet you don't put that much thought into your twenty-something year old's bathroom habits. But I do – with only one of my daughters. And the parents of all transgender children do. Going to the restroom is an activity that is fraught with danger for someone who is transgender and you are making it far more dangerous – not only by this bill but by your continuing anti-trans rhetoric.

Since there is no empirical evidence that trans women, or transgender people more generally, represent a threat to women or children in sex-segregated spaces, anti-trans propagandists, such as the proponents of this legislation, have largely taken to citing anecdotal cases of imagined sexual misconduct

that seemingly involve a transgender individual, and extrapolating from that that all transgender women are inherently dangerous. It then becomes relatively easy to wield language intended to stir up protective sentiment, even in scenarios where sex or sexuality never even come into play, as Representative Lear has done. Using restroom facilities has NOTHING to do with sex or sexuality. However, in addition to using her testimony to deny the existence of transgender individuals, Representative Lear has invoked the “sexual revolution”, “modern ideas about sex”, “pornography”, “rape”, “child molestation”, “slipping of faith” and a “cultural shift ... turning [young girls and young boys] into sexualized objects”. None of these pertain to using restroom facilities. But they certainly play well if the goal is eradicating trans gender identities and pandering to certain special interest groups.

I apply to your sense of justice and fairness and the safety of ALL Ohio students – include transgender students – and implore you to vote no on HB 183.