

Testimony: Opposition for House Bill 183

Laurel Soren

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Chair Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the Higher Education Committee, thank you for accepting my written testimony. My name is Laurel Soren, I'm a constituent of House District 15, and I use they/them pronouns.

I was born, raised, and currently reside in the Greater Cleveland area. I have a successful career at a Fortune 500 company where I am supported as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. The support of colleagues and management has been instrumental in my journey to live as my authentic self. I was assigned female at birth, and part of my journey included coming out as non-binary trans. While that transition was and continues to be welcomed at work, I do not always feel welcomed in my home state of Ohio. Each piece of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation is mentally and emotionally taxing.

Public bathrooms are a topic of stress for many folks in the community and they have come with increased stress for me as I started presenting less and less femme. I get the occasional second look, especially when I am dressed business professional. I attended college while working full time and while I am no longer a student, I can think of many reasons to be on campus to this day – sporting events, theatre, graduation, and recruiting just to name a few. If I get second looks in everyday life using the bathroom that this bill states I need to, what will happen to me at a university if this bill passes? I don't know. And I am afraid to find out.

After earning my MS in Chemistry from Cleveland State University, before accepting my authentic self, I chose to stay in the Cleveland area. Ohio has always been home for me, and I couldn't imagine another place to settle my roots. However, as more and more anti LGBTQ+ legislation is brought forward in the state of Ohio, I have had to question at what point is it no longer safe for me to remain an Ohioan. I have personally heard the same sentiment echoed from other gender diverse folks. If I, a person with an established career, have this thought, what about folks who are in college with a sea of opportunity ahead of them? We already struggle with brain drain, and this would be one more contributing factor to the weakening of our great state.

I ask you to protect the rights of your constituents and give the future of our state a chance. I ask you to vote NO on HB 183.