

Wednesday, October 18, 2023
Ohio House of Representatives
House Higher Education Committee
House Bill 183, proponent testimony of Melinda Steed

Chair Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the Ohio House of Representatives Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in favor of House Bill 183 regarding amendments to sections 3314.03 and 3326.11 and to enact sections 3319.90 and 3345.90 of the Revised Code regarding single-sex bathroom access in primary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education.

I am a parent of children who attend and also formerly attended Elida Local Schools in Lima, Ohio. I recently transferred 3 of my 5 children from Elida to Temple Christian School. My oldest student now attends Apollo Career Center and I have one who is “stuck” at Elida in the 4th grade as a child with an IEP with a specific learning disability. The reason I have chosen to pull my kids from the Elida School district is based on my concerns for the safety of my children in light of this issue.

I disagree with the position the school has taken regarding transgender students and their use of bathroom of choice. Elida has taken the position that students and employees who identify as a gender other than their biological gender, are able to use the bathroom that they identify with rather than the bathroom they are gender assigned to. The school district has a family bathroom available for use for those students and employees who identify as transgender and do not feel safe using the bathroom of their biological assignment. I feel that this is a more than accommodating availability for those who may need such services. I am also greatly concerned that Superintendent Joel Mengerink has blatantly said that regardless of this bill being passed or not, they WILL NOT follow the rules. They will continue to allow students to use the bathroom of their choice.

My concern goes much deeper than the issue of the transgender students, and more into the realm of what does this open our children up to? When we put these new rules and accommodations into place, what kind of dangers are we opening up to these children? When we put aside the transgender students and employees and really look at what is going on, what are we allowing? Let me ask you the following:

How many female students who attend Elida Middle School alone have been sexually assaulted in one form or another? I do not know the exact number, but I can assure you that no matter how much we want that number to be ZERO, it isn't. I would be willing to guess that the number is actually a lot higher than any one of us would like to believe. Now let's process this for a minute. A middle school girl who has been assaulted is in the bathroom, and in walks a student she has known previously as a male, but who now identifies as a female. How utterly frightening that must be for her. No matter if that student means any harm to her or not, for her brain to process that in a split second has to be traumatic and frightening. Grown adults are having these same bathroom/ locker room policy issues and they are unable to process those thoughts and feelings as grown adults and we are asking growing children to accept it and live with it! What message are we sending to these girls who already live in a world they feel unsafe and taken advantage of in? I am in no way claiming that transgender students are violent and out to assault and hurt other people. But I am saying, what are we opening up ourselves to? The world is full of people who live to prey on others, waiting for opportunities, cracks, loopholes, etc. just to take advantage of others.

What happens at sports invitationals? We have large sports invitationals and kids coming from other districts and open schools for people to walk in and out. Who is to stop a grown male from walking into the female bathroom? Who is going to police the bathrooms? Are we going to stand there and confront a grown man walking into the female bathroom? When we open that door to allow for the bathroom of identification and not assignment, who are we to question what that a grown man is? Are we allowed to ask that question or is it now deemed offensive and derogatory? Where is the line? When is it offensive to ask someone if they should be using that bathroom and when is it ok? What are we putting into place? Is a pedophile or human trafficker now able to view this rule as an opportunity to take advantage? How many transgender men still look very much like a man and just wear makeup? Are you going to stop them from walking into the female bathroom? Or are you going to be too afraid to offend someone and get sued rather than stand up for the safety of girls?

Restrooms are already dangerous places in our schools because of fighting, smoking and drugs. It is our responsibility to protect our daughters from the additional risk of harm that comes from being in vulnerable places such as restrooms and locker rooms, where there is an expectation of privacy and not one of sharing that vulnerable space with members of the opposite sex.

I urge your support of House Bill 183.