



**Ohio House of Representatives Public Testimony
House Higher Education Committee**

December 6 ,2023

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

My name is Dr. Rhea Debussy, and my pronouns are she/her. I'm the Director of External Affairs for Equitas Health. As you're likely aware, Equitas Health is a non-profit community health center and one of the largest LGBTQ+ and HIV/AIDS serving healthcare organizations in the country. Each year, we serve tens of thousands of patients in Ohio, Texas, Kentucky, and West Virginia, and since 1984, we have been working to advance "care for all."¹ I'm thankful for the opportunity to address you all today, and I'm here to provide testimony in opposition to the proposed bathroom bill (HB 183), given the harm that it would cause to transgender, non-binary, gender expansive, and intersex youth across the state.

In June 2022, we joined the National Women's Law Center and more than 200 other organizations in calling for the Biden administration and the U.S. Dept. of Education to undo the Trump-era Title IX regulations, which were put in place under former U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos.² We joined this coalition of more than 200 organizations – including other Ohio-based organizations like the Ace and Aro Alliance of Central Ohio, Equality Ohio, LGBTQ+ Allies of Lake County, TransOhio, and others – because the roll-back of Obama-era protections has put LGBTQ+ youth at risk.³ More specifically, the unconstitutional Trump-era Title IX regulations, which we called on the Biden administration to replace, were particularly dangerous for the well-being of transgender, non-binary, and gender expansive youth.⁴

These unconstitutional Trump-era Title IX regulations removed existing protections for gender expansive and intersex youth, and the proposed legislation – which is now under consideration by this committee – seeks to defend some of these regulations as sound public policy. Simply put, forbidding transgender, non-binary, gender expansive, and intersex students from a bathroom facility that aligns with their gender identity is both unconstitutional and inhumane. In fact, data from numerous sources demonstrate the flawed logic of defending such a policy, rather than supporting the needs of our youth. For instance, 2019 research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* indicates that nearly 2% of students identify as transgender. Furthermore, this research also indicates the number of challenges that these students face in educational settings.

¹ <https://equitashealth.com/about-us/>

² <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Title-IX-NPRM-Letter-President-Biden-Jun-15-2022.pdf>

³ <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201605-title-ix-transgender.pdf>

⁴ <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201702-title-ix.pdf>;
https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/proposed-title-ix-regulation-fact-sheet.pdf?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=

Ultimately, nearly 35% attempt suicide, and transgender and non-binary students, who are in less inclusive educational environments, are more likely to have engaged in self-harming behaviors and/or suicide attempts. As such, this data shows that validating our students' diverse gender identities creates a net positive that actually reduces negative mental health outcomes.⁵

To provide some additional context for the adverse impact of HB 183, our agency would like you to consider the realities impacting LGBTQ+ — and *especially* transgender, non-binary, and gender expansive youth — across the country. Long-standing data from GLSEN—a national organization that focuses on LGBTQ+ inclusion in K through 12 settings—shows similar results. Transgender and non-binary students, who are in more supportive educational environments, report lower rates of mental health concerns (i.e. depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, etc.). Additionally, transgender and non-binary students, who are in more supportive educational environments, also report higher rates of student success, including the following: higher GPAs, higher educational aspirations, higher levels of student engagement in co-curricular activities, and more. Regarding these points, the converse is true of transgender and non-binary students in less supportive educational environments that do not validate and celebrate their gender identities.⁶ As we recognize the challenges that face transgender, non-binary, and gender expansive students in educational settings, it is important to note that a policy, like HB 183, will contribute to adverse mental health, physical health, and educational outcomes for students in this demographic.

It is also important to note that sources also note that 1) LGBTQ+ youth with high levels of social support from their family reported suicidality at less than half the rate of those who felt only low or moderate levels of support and 2) LGBTQ+ youth who found their school to be affirming reported lower rates of attempting suicide.⁷ And of course, we know that inclusion and equity are important to Ohioans, and this is one of the many reasons that the Ohio Dept. of Education's strategic plan, "Each Child, Our Future," clearly 1) lists "equity" as one of three core principles, 2) indicates "meet[ing] needs of [the] whole child" as one of ten priority strategies,⁸ and 3) conceptualizes "honoring each student" by emphasizing "equity and [the] specific needs of individual students" as one of five major shifts for the state's educational policy.⁹ Simply put, HB 183 is misaligned with the best practices for supporting our transgender, non-binary, gender expansive, and intersex youth. HB 183 is misaligned with the values of Ohioans. And, HB 183 is misaligned with the goals of the Ohio Dept. of Education.

In reflecting upon such values and their necessity for transgender, non-binary, and gender expansive students, Dr. Teagan Vaughn (she/her), who is the Director of Gender Affirming Care at Equitas Health, notes that:

"Each and every child deserves a safe, welcoming, quality education that prepares and empowers them to become resilient, lifelong learners who contribute to society. Respecting — and embracing — diversity and individuality are easy ways to do just that. Affirming classrooms

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6803a3.htm>

⁶ https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/NSCS19-FullReport-032421-Web_0.pdf

⁷ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/>

⁸ <https://education.ohio.gov/about/eachchildourfuture>

⁹ <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/About/EachChildOurFuture/ECOF-Five-Shifts.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>

and schools help foster growth and development and teach all children – regardless of gender – that they are worthy of respect *and* have a future worth living.”¹⁰

As such, Equitas Health firmly opposes HB 183, which would create harm for transgender, non-binary, gender expansive, and intersex youth, and we urge all members to ensure that this legislation does not advance beyond this committee.

Respectfully submitted,

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¹⁰ Quotation provided on October 8, 2022.