

Chairman Bird, Vice Chair Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson Jr., and Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the need for H.B. No. 8.

As a mother of teenage high-schoolers and a family medicine physician who cares for patients receiving public primary education, I am happy to share some examples so that the committee can step into the classroom and understand how the legal guardians have been increasingly stripped away from their minors once their minors have stepped into a bus and/or into a classroom.

Before stepping into this view, I'd like to acknowledge that the factors leading to these examples are multiple. They are layered. They are complicated and I am sure I do not comprehend all of the moving parts in this problem. I also recognize that the harm occurring does NOT involve, necessarily, nefarious motivations by EVERY teacher and administrator involved in public education. Regardless of the root causes, measures MUST be taken in response to the current scenarios.

Scenario 1 at home

9<sup>th</sup> grade Student A to parent: Was bored at ELA class today...

Parent A: Why, what were you doing?

Student: We had to draw a house and say what the foundation was and what gives us sunlight in the windows.

*Parent searched through the only available curriculum outlines, which did not include any hard copy materials or books but google-form-like editable (without time-stamp) school-based website applications that listed the week's activities which involved reading the Odyssey. Parent could not find this activity listed. The email to the teacher was not answered. Email to principal eventually resulted in email back from the classroom partner teacher 1 week later describing what parent recognized as Social Emotional Surveying of the class, which was assessing stressors and resources in the student's life without consent or notification of parent or results of the assessment to the parent. Parent left wondering what stressors OR alleviating factors were actually identified by the child and whether there were real harms- be they stressors or "resources- in the student's life. And what the teacher was going to even do with that information if not share it with the parent.*

## Scenario 2 at a parent teacher conference

Parent B to Teacher B: My child is struggling. I thought I'd reach out to you to see if you've noticed anything going on. She's been quieter and her grades last report card dropped.

Teacher B: silence

Administrator: Not sure what is going on with child, but we can help get educational resources/support involved....

*Teacher B had been instructed by Administrator that she was NOT permitted to disclose the social emotional struggles of the child, which included the biological male/female changing his/her identity to a more traditionally female/male name and dress style when in school. Teacher B refused to participate in lying to the parent, so Administrator stepped into the conference to intervene and actively hide this student's observed behaviors. Teacher B had grounded fears of legal/professional recourse if the teacher "outed" the academically struggling student.*

## Scenario 3

Teacher F to 100+ 6-8<sup>th</sup> graders: Please introduce yourself, your preferred name, your preferred pronoun and whether we can use this in front of your parents.

Student C to Parent C later: I am supposed to lie to our neighbor, Bill's mom, and call Bill "Betty" at school but "Bill" when Bill's mom is around. What if I forget?

## Scenario 4

Parent Z to Principal:

The programming link on-line that is posted (regarding some curriculum) requires that I ask permission. I put in my email and haven't been granted permission. Why do I have to repeatedly request permission to view this programming?

Principal: A lot of different teachers are involved; I'll remind them to make the links available outside of school-based access.

*Repeat scenario again and again.*

## Scenario 5 in school

Student D to Middle School (7-8<sup>th</sup> grade) MATH teacher: Are you Bi?

Teacher continues to engage in conversation with MS Student regarding sexual attractions, behaviors etc. Parent calls teacher to confirm child's story regarding Math class experience that day; teacher states she is proud to make her classroom inclusive, as that is what administration has been telling them to do and they are making headway over the last 7 years. Teacher also confirmed she did NOT feel pressured to answer student's sexual related question (instead of referring to a health education or science teacher) and preferred to engage in conversation to create an atmosphere of being a "trusted adult" the students could go to as she normalized and affirmed hetero, homo and bisexual behaviors.

*Parent would prefer experts in sexual discussions such as a health teachers or science teachers be the ones to discuss sexual attitudes and behaviors and that teachers keep professional boundaries regarding their private, sexual attitudes and behaviors.*

## Scenario 6 at home

12-year-old Student E to Parent: I put my head on my desk (in embarrassment) there was a man's butt in the movie.

Parent E: I thought you were doing activities related to outer space, like making rockets etc. Was teacher M there?

Student E: No we had a sub and we watched a movie about Mars.

*Parent E called the principal who explained that the child could have excused herself from class if she didn't want to watch. Parent E explained that HAD parent and child been aware of the programming they WOULD have done so. Principal reassured it wouldn't happen again.*

On the topic of withholding student information from parents due to fear of parent backlash: children do NOT always assess-and thus report- their parent's current perceptions or future behavioral actions accurately. As a parent, I have been REPEATEDLY DUMBFOUNDED at what my child thought I was thinking or what I would be doing in response to my child's actions. Withholding student status from a parent, based solely on a teacher (untrained in child psychology and counseling) response to that child's ANTICIPATION of harmful parent response, will often cause MORE harm to the child by actively EXCLUDING THE PARENT from supporting that child. Also, if this legislation is not in place, teachers may feel FORCED to act in this deceptive way rather than SUPPORTED in trusting their gut to involve experts at the school who can better assess and involve the parent.

As a physician, I have seen children harmed by their guardians and, just like teachers, I already have to abide by laws that are already in place. These are the laws that make me a mandated reporter should I suspect a child is in harms way. School staff should continue to be held accountable for following those steps of reporting and should involve skilled and trained school counselors/social workers rather than take it upon themselves to discern whether a situation could result in harm based solely on their discussions with students.

Sincerely,

Tricia L. Bhat, MD