

Testimony

Provided to the Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee

OPPOSING

HB 8: PARENTS BILL OF RIGHTS

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Chairman Bird and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for allowing us to share our perspectives on House Bill 8, The Parents Bill of Rights. We are educators and board members from the Talawanda School District in southwest Ohio, representing 3,000 students and their families.

We strongly oppose HB 8. Existing Ohio legal code already offers parents substantial rights when it comes to the education of their children in public schools, and the vague nature of the wording in this bill will serve to target LGBTQ+ students and families, as well as classroom teachers. We present three key concerns that we hold as board members regarding this legislation:

1. ***HB 8 is unnecessary legislation.*** Public schools in Ohio are required by law (Ohio Code 3313.472 and 3313.212) to maintain consistent and effective communication between parents and schools, and to allow parents mechanisms to review curriculum materials. Our school district, like all others, has policies which stipulate the notification of parents around controversial curriculum, allows for parents to opt their students out of certain lessons, and allows parents to challenge materials in the curriculum. HB 8 is based on mis-information related to schools and teachers; it is unneeded (and unfunded) legislation.

Note: If there *should be* evidence that there are a few districts or schools who are not following the existing Ohio code in this matter, state authorities need to work with those schools to bring them into compliance; don't add additional, confusing, unnecessary

legislation which obfuscates the pre-existing laws. Doing so is ineffective and inefficient governance.

2. ***This legislation can be easily used to target LGTBQ+ students in our schools.***

Requiring schools to report “changes to a student’ mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being” sounds like the legislature would be requiring schools to “out” LGBTQ+ students to their families. Sharing this information without student consent is potentially traumatic for the student and can even be dangerous to their mental and physical health. LGBTQ+ students experience higher rates of victimization and bullying in schools, and have four times the suicide rates of non-LGTBQ students (Center for Disease Control and the Trevor Project).

3. **HB 8 will encourage witch hunts against teachers.** Because the bill is vaguely worded, referencing “sexually explicit content,” it presents an opportunity for community members to target teachers who teach content which might be deemed controversial, and those who are teaching content related to equity and diversity.

Public schools already have, as mentioned in point 1, policies that provide parents ways to raise challenges to particular materials in curriculum and/or opt out their children. The last thing that teachers and administrators need are more baseless, time-wasting challenges from community members — public schools are facing a teacher recruitment and retention problem since COVID, and the teacher shortage will only be made worse by bills like HB 8, which seek to undermine the authority of educators, at the expense of LGTBQ+ students.

We ask you to reject HB 8. This legislation is not only unneeded, but it is potentially harmful to a group of students who are already more at risk for victimization and mental health challenges in schools.