



Opponent Testimony for House Bill 8
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Cynthia Peeples, Founding Director, Honesty for Ohio Education

May 8, 2023

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 8. My name is Cynthia Peeples, my pronouns are she/her, and I am the founding director of Honesty for Ohio Education.

[Honesty for Ohio Education](#) is a nonpartisan, statewide coalition representing more than [50](#) organizational partners advocating for every student's right to receive an honest, high-quality education grounded in truth, facts, and diverse perspectives, regardless of their race, identity, income, or zip code. We believe that students benefit most when caring families, skilled educators, and behavioral health experts work together to create safe, inclusive, affirming learning environments steeped in evidence-based pedagogy and [Ohio's Whole Child framework](#). Healthy, safe learning spaces reach beyond narrowly defined academic goals to develop young students into thriving adults. Important [brain chemistry science](#) tells us that a student's safety and levels of toxic stress have a direct impact on their cognitive function, ability to learn and master content, and self-worth.

This is why we oppose House Bill 8, and similar anti-LGBTQ+ legislation that endangers students by intentionally creating unsafe, hostile learning and living environments. Better known as the Unsafe Students Act, House Bill 8 would force school districts to out LGBTQ+ students to their families, regardless of the risk or danger posed to the child. Not only does this bill dismiss devastating [rates](#) of abuse, violence, and suicide suffered by LGBTQ+ youth in their own [homes](#), it rejects the professional recommendations and protocol of trained medical, legal, and education experts around these complicated issues.

To be clear, LGBTQ+ youth are not struggling with their mental health or prone to suicide because of who they are, but because of how society stigmatizes them. In 2022, the [Trevor Project](#) reported nearly 1 in 5 transgender and nonbinary youth attempted suicide, with LGBTQ+ youth of color reporting higher rates

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than their white peers. Fewer than 1 in 3 transgender and nonbinary youth lived in safe, affirming homes.

Schools have been a lifeline for countless students living in fear or suffering abuse at home. The Trevor Project data also shows that suicide rates significantly decreased when LGBTQ+ students felt affirmed in their schools and lived in safe communities.

It is important to note that while Ohio educators and staff prioritize the safety and well-being of LGBTQ+ students, they first seek safe and healthy dialogue between a student and their family around issues of gender identity and sexuality. The Ohio School Counselor Association follows a [national set of ethical standards](#) explicitly instructing school counselors to prioritize the importance of family when working with any student. National standards state “school counselors recognize their primary ethical obligation for confidentiality is to the students but balance that obligation with an understanding of parents’/guardians’ legal and inherent rights to be the guiding voice in their children’s lives.” The Unsafe Students Act ignores this professional best practice and many like it, which help to foster communication between students, families, and schools, and replaces these ethical standards with a dangerous, limited approach to all student interactions.

Similarly, the opening language of the bill specifying that schools “shall develop and adopt a policy to promote parental involvement” (page 1, line 13) is unnecessary and redundant as it duplicates an existing Ohio Department of Education [policy](#) that was created in response to the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which requires that “a written parental involvement policy shall be developed jointly with, agreed upon with, and distributed to parents”. Ohio districts are already required to create parental advisory committees or a similar strategy allowing parents to review instructional materials and academic curricula presented in the school.

Thousands of students, families, educators, medical professionals, legislators, and your constituents oppose House Bill 8 and condemn politically-motivated anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Each of you was elected to serve all Ohioans, regardless of their pronouns, gender identity, or who they love. While you seem intent on deciding which children are worthy of feeling safe and accepted, Ohio’s most vulnerable young people are experiencing higher rates of discrimination, abuse, illness, and harm.

We urge you to vote NO on Ohio House Bill 8 and prioritize the lives and safety of all Ohio children.

Thank you.

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