

My name is Derek Burtch and I am a resident of Columbus and am also a teacher in the Olentangy Local School District. I am here to oppose HB 8 and the so-called “Parental Bill of Rights.”

The mere introduction of anti-LGBTQIA+ bills has had a chilling effect on queer students in school, and forcibly outing them to their parents would just make one more space where these students do not feel safe. They wouldn’t even be able to talk to their teachers or counselors without the fear of having their confidence violated. I have students that fear for their safety on a daily basis because those in a position to dominate through power, such as yourselves, have given the okay for discrimination in schools. Passing this bill would only codify that in our public institutions; we are allowing hate and bigotry as acceptable behaviors and policy, and taking away safe places for students who are already struggling against a tide of discrimination will only cause this tide to swell.

This resolution also does not represent a majority of parents. Rather, it focuses on a minority of outspoken parents who have time and money to push their agenda through a supermajority of representatives who refuse to answer to the overwhelming voice of the people. The vague language surrounding “sexually explicit” content leaves teachers open to be targeted based on the interpretation of a poorly defined concept. Can I teach Shakespeare? Should I send notice home when Iago tells Desdemona’s father that she and Othello are “making the beast with two backs?”

This blatant attack on professionals who are tasked with supporting students in their creative, analytical, and emotional growth does nothing but weaken our public schools, which I know is also one of the main points of this legislative session soaked in anti-education legislation.

Our schools and local school boards are the appropriate people to set individual policies that impact small groups of students. The state legislature creating these big government policies will have no efficient and fair way to ensure they are implemented in a way that does not harm students, let alone how this bill would impact the teaching force, of which we are already at a shortage for multiple reasons, fear being one of them. No one on this committee is in schools, on the ground with students. The mental health of all students is concerning right now, and to pass this bill would only make matters worse for LGBTQIA+ students.

This bill disguises itself as protecting children and families, when in all reality, it is meant to harm specific students and families. Do not pass this. Vote against discrimination. Vote for the health of all students and do not let this bill come out of this committee.

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