

Connor opposition testimony to HB8

Chairman Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, I am The Rev. Alice Connor, evangelical pastor and mother of a trans child who came out a year ago at 13. I am here representing not only myself but also The Rt. Rev. Wayne Smith, bishop diocesan of the Diocese of Southern Ohio.

I have been ordained almost 20 years in the Episcopal Church and have been working as a campus minister for the Evangelical Lutheran Church at University of Cincinnati for most of that time. I have a masters degree in theology, and I have had hundreds of LGBTQ students in my life, many of whom are trans. I say all this so you have a sense of why you should listen to me.

House Bill 8 is, in Biblical terms, a plague and a sin. I said this very thing in testimony against HB6 and will continue to say it until you hear us. Outing children to their parents destroys lives. These young people may not have told their parents about their identities because they live in fear of how their parents will respond--perhaps with a shaming lecture, but perhaps with further verbal or physical abuse, with conversion therapy, even with death. Thirty eight percent of trans youth report experiencing homelessness at some point in their lives much of the time because their families have mistreated them or thrown them out of the house -because they are trans.- House Bill 8, as well as HB6 and HB68, chooses death for these youth, chooses to expose and to hurt them when they are some of the most at risk.

There are some loud Christian voices supporting this bill. These voices say being trans is a sin, is a crime against nature, or even that trans people themselves are predators--this is all nonsense. I would be delighted to regale you with stories from scripture of the fluidity of God's gender, of Biblical characters who are outside the binary of male and female, of the Bible's ethic of compassion and preferential option for the oppressed. Not the majority, not those who have might or cultural right on their side, the minorities, the remnant. God is about the 1 sheep, not the 99, and that 1, today, is our trans youth. That one sheep is my trans student who was forcibly restrained many times for exorcism of his trans demons. That one sheep is my student who was sent to conversion therapy for years and bears both physical and emotional scars now to the point that he can hardly eat and struggles to trust anyone, even himself. That one sheep is my own trans child. If god is about the one sheep, then what are we even doing here?

I am here to be clear that the loud Christian voices do not represent me nor the entirety of the Christian faith. Indeed, there are hundreds of thousands of the Christian faithful who are gay and trans, who love gay and trans people, and who are horrified by bills and theologies like this. The loud Christian voices do not speak for me. They do not speak for my students or my family or my church. They don't even speak for the majority of conservative Christians: a recent Fox News poll revealed 86% of respondents said it's a problem that families with transgender children are targets of political attacks. 86%.

I know commentator Michael Knowles would like to eradicate trans people from public life--he said as much at CPAC recently. Do you? We deserve your honesty--do you actually want to see all trans people made invisible? Eliminated from public life? If so, what you are advocating for is genocide. And God has a thing or two to say about that.

And even more ridiculous--honestly, laughable, if it weren't deadly serious, is the language in this bill around "sexually explicit" materials. LGBTQ people aren't sexually explicit simply for existing, just as I am not sexually explicit by simply standing in front of you as a woman. Do I arouse you right now? With my clergy collar and suit and simply being a woman? That's been the argument for hundreds of years, even within the Bible itself--the presence of a woman means the presence of male arousal. Bathsheba bathing in the privacy of her home was cause for King David to lust after her and take her to his bed. St. Paul tells women to cover their hair lest it cause men to stumble--our hair or a shoulder simply being present is enough to cause serious sexual sin? Ludicrous. It's laughable and embarrassing that men would be so out of control as to think these things. Simply talking about the existence of LGBTQ people is not sexually explicit, it's not arousing, and it's not destroying the youth.

No, this bill is yet another smokescreen to cover a few House members' disgust with the mere idea of transpeople existing. There are no good arguments for it and many against. The only argument you have for HB8 is "ew, gross" which is a childish way to govern.

I am here as a pastor and as a parent to say that this bill not only will not protect any children--not a single one--but also that it is contrary to the Bible and 2000 years of Christian teaching. AND that anyone who supports this bill is not pursuing justice and love and liberation as Jesus taught us, but bondage and death. Please do not pass HB8 out of committee.