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Chair Bird, Vice Chair Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and other members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for receiving my testimony today. My name is Lalitha Pamidigantam, and I write on behalf of YWCA Columbus to oppose House Bill 8, the so-called "Parents Bill of Rights." At YWCA Columbus, we are concerned about the unintended consequences this bill might have on marginalized youth, especially those who fall into the LGBTQ+ category, at a time when tensions are heightened and their identities discourses by the entire nation.

At YWCA Columbus, we are on a mission to eliminate racism, empower women, and promote peace, justice, freedom, and dignity to all. In this mission, we locate our service to the youth of our community through empowering young girls in their authentic selves, including transgender girls and non-binary youth. We also center the autonomy and dignity of youth, who are the experts in their own stories and needs. While the bill attempts to frame a responsible relationship among a school, a child, and their parents, the vague language of the bill might allow for the conflation of "sexually explicit material" to LGBTQ+ material or identities. Furthermore, the bill outlines that health-related issues must be reported out to parents, but this could look like potentially outing a child before they are ready to their family. For example, if a child socially transitions at school, but not at home due to concerns of abuse – or simply not being ready – then that may be a reportable issue. While the bill makes an exception for instances of potential abuse, abuse can happen behind closed doors or be otherwise difficult to ascertain until it happens. We all deeply want to believe that a child's life is safe in the hands of their parents or guardians, but we know, especially in the case of LGBTQ+ youth, that is simply not always the case. Marginalized children, such as transgender youth, experience high rates of eviction from their family home. According to the Trevor Project, "28% of LGBTQ+ youth reported experiencing homelessness or housing instability at some point in their lives – and those who did had two to four times the odds of reporting depression, anxiety, self-harm, considering suicide, and attempting suicide compared to those with stable housing."¹ Those who do not face a threat as public as eviction might still face trauma and rifts within their families, which, without the proper social work intervention, could strain their lives.

Similarly, administration may be required to report relationships – even heterosexual ones – between teenagers to parents. This becomes a problem especially in strict religious or traditional households, regardless of which religion or which tradition, where a child may face serious consequences for something as simple and ordinary as having a "crush" on a classmate. What each individual family needs will differ based on their experiences, culture, and upbringing – the school's responsibility is to remain steadfast in educating their child, and not in intervening on each and every personal choice a child makes.

Ultimately, we ask what the school's role is in a child's wellbeing. At a time when public schools are facing criticism for employing research-based, whole-child frameworks that aid in the best development of all children, inserting burdensome requirements that force teachers to police their students is not in the best interest of the child. Instead of cultivating a student-teacher relationship based in respect, understanding, and empathy, this bill would require the teacher to act as an untrustworthy authority with the power to potentially devastate a child's home life. We encourage this committee to think of children as human beings with autonomy, whose decisions and choices should be respected and treated with dignity. We ask for a "no" vote on this bill.

Thank you,
Lalitha Pamidigantam
Advocacy Manager, YWCA Columbus

¹ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/>

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