



The Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and
Gender Expansive Identities of Ohio

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson and esteemed members of the House Primary & Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 8. My name is Mariah Payne, and I am submitting written testimony on behalf of the Ohio Counseling Association (OCA). In the OCA, I act as the Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities of Ohio (SAIGEO) Northeast Representative. I am a licensed professional counselor in North Ridgeville Ohio and am incredibly active in my community. My clinical work focuses on LGBTQ+ mental health, making me well-qualified to speak on this topic.

The OCA and SAIGEO oppose House Bill 8 because it will adversely impact youth across the state. This bill has the ability to place our LGBTQ+ students at an increased risk as it would force teachers and school counselors to disclose their identities or orientations. House Bill 8 threatens the safety and mental wellbeing of students exploring their sexual, affectional, or gender identities. In fact, the continued proposal of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation is already negatively impacting the mental wellbeing of LGBTQ+ youth (The Trevor Project, 2023).

During The Trevor Project's most recent survey, students were asked their feelings regarding new policies, such as House Bill 8, that require schools to tell a student's parent or guardian if they request to use a different name/pronoun or if they identify as LGBTQ+ at school. Respondents reported feeling angry, stressed, scared, nervous, and sad (The Trevor Project, 2023). In addition, LGBTQ+ youth feel angry about new policies that ban teachers from discussing LGBTQ+ topics in the classroom (The Trevor Project, 2023). We can assuredly state that if House Bill 8 passes, it will worsen the mental health of our LGBTQ+ students.

As mental health professionals, we can empathize with parents and their concerns about the wellbeing of their children. We encourage parents to create a safe and affirming environment so that their children may feel comfortable to discuss their mental health, identities, and orientations. Every child is unique and has the inalienable right to disclose their orientations at their own pace. There is research that indicates LGBTQ+ youth come out to their parents at greater rates than that of their teachers and guidance counselors. When respondents were asked who was aware of their sexual orientation, sixty-eight percent reported they were out to their parents; regarding gender identity fifty-one percent of respondents reported being out to their parents. Less than half of LGBTQ+ respondents were out to an adult at school and were much less likely to disclose their gender identity than sexual orientation (Trevor Project-main). Forcing these trained professionals to disclose this information to students' parents would reduce the amount of supportive adults available to these children and threaten the confidentiality of school counselors.

Counselor-client relationships are built on trust and a mutual understanding of the client's confidentiality. This is crucial to the efficacy of counseling adolescents (Bray, 2022). School counselors are trained in understanding the limitations of confidentiality and how to navigate disclosure when providing services. Seventy-one percent of LGBTQ+ youth reported feeling sad or hopeless and thirty-nine percent of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered attempting suicide (The Trevor Project, 2019). It is crucial that students feel safe turning to teachers and school counselors as LGBTQ+ youth who have at least one accepting adult are less likely to attempt suicide (The Trevor Project, 2019). If passed, House Bill 8 would tell students they should not disclose their mental health difficulties or identities to staff at their school.

This bill won't just make LGBTQ+ youth feel less safe in schools, it will make their schools less unsafe. Every child should feel safe in Ohio's schools, that is why we urge you not to pass House Bill 8. We are clinical mental health counselors, school counselors, counselor educators, and counselors-in-training. We have the expertise to tell you that this will irreversibly harm the mental and emotional well-being of youth in this state.

Written by Mariah Payne, MA, LPC, SAIGEO Northeast representative, and Gene Dockery, MA, LPC, NCC, SAIGEO Liaison to the OCA Government Relations Committee and SAIGE Public Policy Chairperson

Edited by Kristin S. Curran, MAEd, LPC, SAIGEO Secretary

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