

Chairman Bird, Vice-Chair Fowler-Arthur, Ranking-Member Robinson, and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee. My name is EJ Busby, and I use they/he pronouns. I am asking you to oppose HB8, as it is harmful and dangerous.

I was raised in a very sheltered home. It was a small town, in rural West Texas. My mom, a single mother of three children under ten years old, had married a truly terrible man that she thought could provide us security. He pushed us to move out to the middle of nowhere, so poor you couldn't drink the well water and so far out you couldn't connect to the city water either. He ushered us into an Orthodox Presbyterian church that promoted the virtues of the obedience of women and children, and the headship of men. And he homeschooled us kids, to protect us from the evil agenda and brainwashing of the state curriculum.

I'm going to tell you some details of the way I was raised, that this bill actively enables, in the hope that you will be able to see how this bill would make isolating and abusing children that much easier. At this point I would like to give a trigger warning for mentions and descriptions of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

My stepfather was very much in charge of my home. We appeared to be the perfect, obedient family. Without access to the internet, or a library, or a school, there was no way for me to know what he didn't choose to tell me. My older brothers taught me to read in the dead of night, because my stepfather didn't think women needed to. I was never taught the names of my body parts, and I absolutely never spoke out of turn. It wasn't until many years passed that I learned that fathers don't own their daughter's bodies, and that there are parts of my body that only I get to say who has access to them. When I mentioned as a child that I thought women were just as beautiful as men, I was tortured so thoroughly that I didn't think I would survive. When I expressed that I didn't understand why I couldn't be a boy scout like my brothers, I didn't see sunlight for two months.

To me, all of this was completely normal. I never knew the difference until my mom and I escaped, and I went to school for the first time. I learned there that I ought to have a voice. I learned that my stepfather's word wasn't law. I learned about my body, in precise, clinical terms that were extremely helpful for my ability to care for myself. I learned that sometimes, other girls thought girls were pretty too, and we could giggle about them the same as we did for the cute boys.

Parents should not have total control over what their children learn about in school. They already have the freedom to teach whatever they like at home. For some kids, school is a safe haven, where they are free to learn and be challenged. To bring threats of continued censorship, parental control, and surveillance rips away that security.

Line 43-47 of this bill states that administrators may "withhold such information from a parent if a reasonably prudent person would believe that disclosure would result in abuse, abandonment, or neglect; that belief shall not be based on a parent's religious or political beliefs." That caveat excepting religious beliefs would have left 15-year-old-me in my abusive home. My abuse was

extremely covert, and I didn't talk about it at all. The main tell was my stepfather's religious extremism.

The required notification about changes in a child's behavior is a death trap for queer, abused, or otherwise unaccepted children. Forcibly outing anyone, especially a vulnerable child, is an unforgivable act. Without protections for children that at risk of abuse by their legal parent, you will be sentencing children to years of torture with no escape.

This "Parent's Bill of Rights" is just an excuse to allow parents totalitarian control over their children, and puts vulnerable kids at risk of abuse. For the sake of every person with a childhood like mine, oppose HB8.