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Primary and Secondary Education Committee
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215
OHRPrimary&SecondaryEducationCommittee@ohiohouse.gov

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RE: HB8 "Parents Bill of Rights" or the unsafe student bill - *oppositional testimony*

Dear Chair Rep. Bird and respected Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on this important issue. TransOhio is familiar with the ongoing issues in Ohio public and private schools, including attempts to reduce or remove all educational and extracurricular content that is affiliated with LGBTQ+ identities, attempts to ban trans students from participating in team sports, attempts to restrict restroom usage, and refusals to refer to trans students by their names and the correct pronouns (even in English class, where students learn about the various articles of speech). This bill does not attempt to remedy any of those issues or to protect LGBTQ+ students from discrimination, harassment, or other harms. HB8 instead focuses on an alleged right of unsupportive parents to dictate what is taught to all students, over the objections of supportive parents, students, and teachers. HB8 promotes dishonesty in education and fostering an unsafe learning environment for minority students across Ohio.

Ohio has seen a few "forced outing" bills over the past several years, and they have all failed. Previous bills have required schools to immediately notify parents if a student displays any signs of gender dysphoria or "demonstrates a desire to be treated in a manner opposite of the child's biological sex." The current bill at hand lacks that expressly transphobic language, but requiring a district to report "changes to a student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being" is simply code for requiring districts to out LGBTQ+ students to their family. And in the language of this bill, this is required even if the school knows that the student's health, safety, and welfare will be put in jeopardy by this disclosure, because of a parent's "political or religious" beliefs are held out to be superior than the student's self-expression.

Ohio educators are generally not experts in childhood psychology and cannot diagnose students with gender dysphoria. And they shouldn't be. Even if a student shares their trans identity with a teacher, that is no reason to contact parents. Sharing this deeply personal information without consent from the student can be traumatizing and even dangerous. TransOhio is aware of an alarmingly increasing number of trans youth, ages 10 through 18, who have run away from home because it was not a supportive environment. For some of these kids, at school with their friends and supportive teachers, was their safe place. When schools



across the state have started overturning inclusive policies, largely at the demand of “concerned parents” who are politically motivated and often do not even have children in the district, countless students lost their safe space.

Schools must remain a safe, trusted space for students and educators, regardless of their race, gender identity, or sexual orientation. The overly vague standards in HB8 go against the Whole Child Framework of the Ohio Department of Education, which emphasizes “equity” and the “specific needs of individual students” as one of the core tenets of our strategic plan for education. How are the specific needs of LGBTQ+ students being met here?

Ohio already has regulations that govern parental notice, review, and opting out of instruction. And has for a while. This is a non-issue. Public schools are already required to establish policies that allow parents to be actively involved in their children’s education. Parents can attend school board meetings or read the minutes later from home. Parents can attend PTA meetings. Parents can review the lesson plans and homework at any point during the school year. Parents can attend parent-teacher conferences and request additional meetings as necessary. Parents can communicate directly with their children’s teachers. It has never been easier to be involved. Yet this bill is rooted in the false belief that teachers at Ohio schools are running wild, and there is no way for parents to know what is being told to their students behind closed doors. That’s simply not true.

Please listen to the voices of students today. It’s their education and their lives that will be affected.

TransOhio is very in tune with the trans community here in Ohio. You are not. Founded in 2005, TransOhio is the only state-wide trans-led equality organization. group of volunteers dedicated to education, advocacy, support, and providing community to trans people and their allies. TransOhio has worked with local, state, and national efforts to draft and update policies related to transgender people, such as nondiscrimination ordinances, employee policies, student handbooks, etc. We’ve spoken with school districts, educators, student clubs, and interest groups. TransOhio has provided educational training to church groups, civil groups, corporate employees, volunteers, providers, and allies. Along with our community partners, we host the Ohio Name Change Legal Clinic, which helps trans folks and their parents better understand the legal process of changing identity documents. TransOhio host the annual Trans & Ally Symposium, now in its 14th year, to help foster community and to better educate allies of the greater trans communities. You’re invited to attend and learn more. We all can always expand our knowledge.

We urge you to **vote no**. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact us with any questions. We welcome further discussion.

Respectfully,

TransOhio Board of Directors