

Primary and Secondary Education Committee Members, I am submitting this testimony in opposition to HB8 which will cause significant harm to children in Ohio. I live in a rural county in Northeast Ohio and am on the board of a small nonprofit organization that serves the LGBTQ+ community and their families. I am disappointed that leadership of this committee has decided not to allow public testimony on this extraordinarily dangerous bill. Apparently, constituents voices are not valued or wanted in the state of Ohio.

Had I been allowed to testify in person, I could tell you about the children our organization has worked with who have been thrown out of their homes or abused because a parent found out they were LGBTQ. I could tell you the story of a high school senior who, along with his boyfriend, was severely beaten when his father learned he was gay and how we were asked to help find emergency housing once the boys were released from the hospital. I could tell you about children who attend our support groups who live in group homes and foster homes because their parents rejected them for being LGBTQ. I could also tell you about multiple suicides our county has experienced the past several years because children couldn't tell their parents they thought they might be gay. It is unfortunate that for some members of this committee these children don't matter. Their voices are not important, their stories easily dismissed, and their lives unworthy of protection.

I'm a parent of two teens myself so I understand the desire of a parent to know everything going on in their child's life. Both of my children see therapists and have for some time. And yes, there are many times when I would really like to know what they are talking about. But this is about them, not me, and they have the right to say things to a trusted adult without that adult "tattling" to me or my husband. All mental health professionals and school personnel are already mandatory reporters. Children will never open up to a counselor if they think everything they say will be repeated to their parents, thus defeating the entire purpose of counseling and preventing children from seeking desperately needed help. Would you tell your counselor about an issue you were having with your spouse if you knew they would turn around and divulge to your spouse what you said? Probably not. And yet, if you don't disclose something to your counselor they can't help you work through the issue.

I know how hard it is to not know everything about your child. However, part of being a parent includes knowing when your child needs to talk to someone who is not you. Without the ability to do that, the lives of Ohio's children will become extremely more difficult.