

Opponent Testimony for HB68
Health Policy Committee
May 24, 2023

Astrid Burkle

Chairperson Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Public Health Policy Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Astrid and my pronouns are she and they. I am from northeast Ohio, and I am a transgender girl. My favorite color is purple. I love unicorns, pigs, and all things Broadway! I am the sister of Abs and I am so fortunate to have loving and supportive parents and grandparents. My sister, mom, and grandma are here with me today and my dad is supporting me from overseas and we all oppose House Bill 68.

From as far back as I can remember, I have felt like I was living in the wrong body. During the first years of my life, I was just like every other happy toddler. In preschool and kindergarten though, I had to change who I really was to fit in. I was no longer happy. When I wanted to sing along to Moana, the girls told me I couldn't because I was a boy. When I said my favorite color was purple, they told me it wasn't, so I changed it to blue and orange, because I thought those were "boy colors". By the time I got to first grade, I started having anxiety and occasional breakdowns. I even started pulling out my eyelashes as a way to cope. At that point, I was really into unicorns and painted nails, and my parents allowed me to express myself a little. They even bought me a pair of sparkly, glittery shoes! This felt like a step toward who I was, but it wasn't quite right yet. I wasn't a boy who liked unicorns and sparkly shoes and painted nails...I was a girl who liked unicorns and sparkly shoes and painted nails! Then COVID isolated me from everyone except my family. While most of that experience was terrible, it allowed me to break society's unfair rules a little. I started going to online school "laced up from the waste up" in sparkly dresses and Penn State hoodies. I also started growing my hair and braiding it as soon as it was long enough. It was the most ME I had ever felt in my whole life up to that point! For the remainder of first grade and first half of second grade, I remained remote and was able to explore my gender identity more in a safe space. In the second half of second grade we returned to in-person learning. We were wearing masks and I had really long hair. I wanted to go back to school with she/her pronouns, but my parents suggested I ease into a transition, so I started using they/them pronouns and when other classmates would ask me if I was a boy or a girl, I would respond saying, "What does that matter, I'm just me!" At the very end of second grade, I decided to donate my hair and in order to

make sure it was long enough, we had to cut my hair really short. I was excited to donate my hair, but seeing myself in the mirror with such short hair, I KNEW THAT I WAS A GIRL AND COULD NOT GO ON LIVING AS A BOY ANY LONGER!

That summer, I picked a new name and socially transitioned. My mom took me shopping for feminine clothing and I probably would have bought everything in the girls' section if my mom had let me! We met with my Principal and School Social Worker and Counselor to make a plan for coming back to school in third grade to make sure I felt safe and supported. My school administration and teachers were so supportive and most of my classmates were curious, but respectful. There were a few mean kids, but the teachers and Principal addressed those situations immediately. Third grade was my first school year as Astrid and it was the happiest I had ever been! Now I am finishing fourth grade, in a self-contained gifted program. I play the clarinet and I have my first school chorus concert next week! I just had my first sleepover for my birthday! I am just your average, goofy, fourth-grade girl!

I just turned ten years old and I am nearing the time in my life when my parents and doctors will need to discuss introducing blockers. HB68 would not allow me to go on puberty blockers, which would force me to go through male puberty. I am terrified of how my body would change and how my mental health would be impacted if I were forced to experience that change. I am begging you to think of youth like me when you are considering this bill and let my parents and my doctor who know me SO WELL with my input, choose what is best for me. Please, please, please VOTE NO on House Bill 68!