

Chair Lipps, Vice-Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Public Health Policy Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 68.

My name is Minna Zelch, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm the parent of a transgender child. I am strongly opposed to House Bill 68 which prevents transgender youth from receiving proven, life-saving, medical care. I could read statements supporting gender affirming care for youth from every major medical organization. But I'm not a doctor. Instead, I'm going to tell you our daughter's story.

This is the story of a child who was practically born talking. At 8 years old she started her own business giving educational shows about her reptiles to rooms full of people. She was also the first to speak up whenever she felt someone else was being treated unfairly. This child was proud of her voice and she knew how to use it.

In 4<sup>th</sup> grade our daughter discovered that she loved to sing and perform. Music theater became an essential part of her life. It was how she expressed herself, where she found friends, and how she relieved the stress of school and everyday life. Singing is what brought her joy, until the day it suddenly didn't.

Our daughter came out as transgender just after she turned thirteen. Her whole life she knew she was different from other people but she didn't really know why. My husband and I immediately found her a trained therapist to help her figure out if she really was transgender, and we started assembling a team of medical professionals to help guide us.

When our daughter's voice started changing at age fifteen her entire world came crashing down. She went from a confident, outgoing child to a depressed, anxiety riddled kid practically overnight. She dropped out of choir, quit her reptile business, gave up her beloved theater, and refused to sing and often even speak because her voice did not match who she was inside. When she had to pick a world language for high school she chose American Sign Language so she wouldn't have to talk. She lost her purpose, her passion, her friends, and her sense of self-worth. It was like a switch was flipped and her light just went out.

The decision to let our daughter start hormones was agonizing and one we arrived at as a family only after years of research, discussions with her medical team and our extended family, and countless sleepless nights. Every parent worries about whether they are making the right decisions for their kid. For parents of trans kids, or kids with any other medical condition or special need, that worry is ten-fold.

Today, we are certain our family made the right choice for our kid. Our daughter knows she is a girl the same way our son knows he is left-handed. No one made them this way. No one put the ideas in their heads. It is just how they were born. Thanks to three years on female hormones and six years of care with an incredible medical team, we were able to prevent our daughter's voice from becoming even deeper, and stop her from developing other secondary sex characteristics that would have been even more devastating.

Our daughter's light is starting to flicker again. She is finally getting her confidence back. Instead of thoughts taken over by hatred and self-loathing she is daring to believe in herself again. This was evident a year ago at Christmas when she sang *Silent Night* as a solo at our church. It was the first time she sang in public in four long, heartbreaking years.

This is the power of gender affirming health care. Affirming health care has helped our daughter find her voice. It has brought her back to us. And, more importantly, it has brought her back to herself. I don't want to think about our daughter enduring an additional three years of agony if we had been forced to wait until she turned eighteen before we could access that care. Imagine telling a parent whose child has cancer, or epilepsy, or any other medical condition that they could not seek treatment for their child until they turned eighteen because there could be side effects the child might not like when they became an adult? It's unconscionable. Most of us would bend over backwards to help those parents access care. Why should it be any different just because the child is transgender?

Our daughter has had eight different medical professionals from three different hospital systems participate in her gender care in the last six years. We received second, third, fourth, and fifth opinions before we made any decisions. This legislation wouldn't even allow us to have one conversation. How is it that my husband and I are qualified to make other medical decisions for our children, such as if they should have surgery for a

broken bone or take ADHD medication, but we're not qualified to decide if and when they should receive gender care?

All transgender kids and their families deserve the basic right of deciding what medical care they receive. All parents of transgender kids deserve the right to receive information on every care option so they can weigh the risks and benefits and chose what is best for their unique child, just like they would for any other situation.

Those of us who have been speaking out against this legislation have been called a lot of things; child abusers, human traffickers, murderers, to name a few. Just a few weeks ago we were even accused of being possessed by demons. As someone who has attended church regularly since age 4, served as a Sunday school teacher, Elder, and Deacon, and spent nine years on the Board of Trustees at a seminary, this accusation was particularly hurtful. We have never lived near blood relatives and our churches have always become our families. They have loved, supported, and nurtured our children their whole lives. The people who wrote this legislation do not speak for every person of faith. They are entitled to their beliefs but the constitution does not entitle them to make the rest of us conform to their views. There are devout believers around the world whose faith in fact calls them to love transgender people just as they are. I've sat in pews next to many of them. Our religious freedoms are being infringed by this legislation. My religious beliefs require me to support my daughter. I would rather be possessed by a demon than abandon my child.

Please vote "no" on this harmful legislation. Thank you for your time.