

Chair Lipps, Vice-Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston and members of the Public Health Policy Committee, my name is Halle Martin. Thank you for allowing me to provide this testimony.

As a voter who formerly voted Republican for a long time, what I want to do is ask the proponents of House Bill 68, “why?” Why are you abandoning long-held Republican principles?

The Republican party I used to know believed in individual empowerment. But now you want to take away the power of Ohio citizens to make medical decisions for themselves and their children under the guidance of their medical providers. Some of you objected to COVID-19 vaccine mandates. You believed it was your right to make medical decisions for yourselves and on behalf of your children. The families of transgender children should also have that right. Even Anna Herran, the lead proponent testifying at the hearing of this Committee on April 26, indicated that it is her hope that parents be allowed to be independent and to be able to make decisions on behalf of their children. And I wonder why you are seeking a different standard for families of transgender youth as compared to what you want for your own family or what Anna Herran wants for hers.

The Republican party I used to know believed in limited government. But now you are trying to substitute governmental judgment for that of trained medical experts. Access to gender-affirming healthcare services is essential – even lifesaving – for trans youth. The WPATH Standards of Care are evidence-based guidelines for the provision of transgender healthcare based on the best available science. Gender-affirming interventions are based on decades of clinical experience and research; they are not experimental. All major medical associations (including the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians, the Endocrine Society, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Psychiatric Association, among others) have supported the provision of gender-affirming health care as medically necessary care. And I wonder why you seek to substitute your judgment for the judgment of the Ohio Board of Medicine and all major medical associations through regulation.

The Republican party I used to know believed in the American Dream and in turn, the economic good of this State. If all individuals prosper, Ohio prospers. If Ohio can attract an educated workforce to the State, the State prospers. If Ohio can attract new jobs to the State, the State prospers. But now you are considering laws that alienate families, businesses, prospective employees and prospective students from Ohio. Now, Ohio is a laughing-stock nationwide as this Committee takes testimony about demonic possession. And I wonder why you are sacrificing the economic interests of the State in order to bully a small minority of the population.

The abandonment of these principles is personal to me. I have a 20-year old transgender daughter. She suffered from depression for years during high school. She didn’t speak much. She didn’t hang out with friends or family much. She saw therapists. She took anti-depressants, none of which worked. They didn’t work because her depression wasn’t caused by a chemical imbalance – it was caused by not feeling comfortable in her own skin, in not showing the world who she really was. At age 18, she told us she was transgender. Free from the internal strife and secrets, she *immediately* became more chatty and noticeably happier. She stopped taking depression medication. At age 19, she began hormone therapy. She is herself. FINALLY. And nothing I have done in my life is as courageous as my daughter’s decision and actions to represent herself as she feels. I am SO VERY PROUD of her.

You might say, “Well, that’s her choice. And she was an adult when she started hormones.” My daughter is 6 feet tall, with gorgeous long red curls and size 13 shoes. This isn’t a fad or a lark. Do you think she would CHOOSE this life? Do you think she would choose to worry that when she walks in a bathroom – men’s or women’s – her safety is at issue? Do you think she would choose to have lawmakers discuss her identity as if she were subhuman? Do you think she would choose all the burdens that being transgender means? This is not a choice. And given that, if she had reconciled these feelings sooner, would I have supported providing her with puberty blockers so that she wasn’t 6 feet tall and her feet weren’t as big as an NBA player? So she could find clothes and shoes that fit? So she wasn’t in constant danger because of her obvious trans-ness? Absolutely, yes, I would have. After therapy and after time and after consultations with her physicians, I would have liked for her to have that choice.

Please do not take away the choice of other families to let their children be themselves. Please vote no on House Bill 68.