



Northwest Ohio Trans Advocacy

Dear Chairman and Committee Members,

I'm writing today in opposition to House Bill 68, also known as the SAFE Act. As a trans person myself, I can personally attest to the life changing and life saving benefits of gender affirming care. Like so many trans kids, I know I was "different" from a very young age. However, I lacked the language to communicate that to my family and loved ones.

Due to the stigma attached to LGBTQ people in the culture of my childhood, I internalized much of that bigotry. I never learned to be cisgender or pray it away, but I did learn to hide their reality of my existence to the point where it was consuming me, from the inside out. For the better part of thirty-four years, I struggled in silent suffering. I only turned to gender affirming care when I'd reached the breaking point of no longer being able to stand the prospect of waking another day. That decision not only saved my life but gave me a life worth living.

In 2014 a young Ohio teen faced the same dilemma. For her, trans affirming care wasn't an option – not because of bills like this one but because of the same cultural and religious stigma I'd endured. Unfortunately, she didn't get to see the life worth living that I've come to realize. Instead, she stepped out into traffic and ended her life. She left a note explaining her painful decision. Gender affirming care could have been available, but her family said no. Perhaps a different decision by the family would've resulted in a different end to this story. Perhaps a 26-year-old Leelah would be standing before you today. However, we will never know.

Her family made a decision, but many other Ohio families have made very different decisions. Many families chose to love their children more than their own bigotries and prejudices. They make informed decisions, in consultation with trained medical professionals. This bill takes that decision away from them, their children and the trained professionals helping to guide them. It replaces medical science and years of study with the personal convictions of legislators.

Contrary to the name of this bill, gender affirming care is not "experimentation." The controversy of gender affirming care exists only within cultural and religious debates. It is not controversial among the trained medical experts that have studied the topic. Just consider the testimony you receive in this committee. Are the proponents of this bill and those like them, trained and experienced in the field or are they coming to you with religious, moral and cultural objections?

Parents of trans children aren't going to simply stick around and place their children at risk to this sort of overreach. You are actively creating a trans refugee situation – where families of trans children will flee the state of Ohio. You are telling trans youth that they aren't welcome in the state of Ohio. Bills like this, even when they fail, have a lasting impact on trans youth and even adults. It conveys a message of contempt for our very existence, and it emboldens those that victimize us. I am begging you to vote no on this bill and leave medical decisions to those with the expertise to make them.

Very truly yours,

Arienne C. Childrey

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