

Chairman Lipp,

Below, please find my written testimony in opposition to HB 68. **I will be unable to attend in person, but send my written testimony for consideration.**

Dear Representatives--

I am a queer person who grew up in Ohio in the 1990s and early 2000s in a community that told me being gay is one of the worst things I could be. I had no access to affirming mental healthcare until I reached college in another state. I barely survived those years and was, at many moments, very close to taking my own life. When federal law changed so that the state of Ohio had to recognize my wife's and my marriage, we made the decision to move back to my hometown of Cleveland, where we participate abundantly in community life and contribute to the tax base. Legal protections keep people and families in Ohio and will bring more people in.

I am a person who identifies with the sex and gender assigned me at birth. I had and have many more protections and privileges than do the youth whose right to self-determination you debate today. All I needed in my youth was affirming mental healthcare and without that I suffered enormously. That healthcare wasn't even banned by law, just by the custom of the community I grew up in. If, like so many of my young trans and gender nonconforming community members today, I saw that my access to ANY kind of affirming healthcare was up for a legal ban, what would I have to live for? If I was a gender-conforming young person and heard that my trans classmates were being shut out from both healthcare and access to community participation in sports by the highest powers in the state, why would I treat that person with anything less than contempt?

The luckiest families with gender-expansive and trans youth will flee this state. What a hideous thing that is to say. There will be many more children whose families cannot afford to leave this place that you and I and they call home.

Above and beyond all this, rank upon rank of long-established medical procedure confirms that gender affirming healthcare of all kinds contributes to the health and flourishing of people, families, and communities.

The American Psychiatric Association made a statement in 2020 regarding gender affirming care. According to a Position Statement on Treatment of Transgender (Trans) and Gender Diverse Youth, the APA:

- Supports access to affirming and supportive treatment for trans and gender diverse youth and their families, including appropriate mental health services, and when indicated puberty suppression and medical transition support.
- Opposes all legislative and other governmental attempts to limit access to these services for trans and gender diverse youth, or to sanction or criminalize the actions of physicians and other clinicians who provide them.

There will be horrible personal and material consequences to passing this bill. I exhort you to stand on the side of human dignity and freedom and flourishing and to vote against it.

My witness form is herewith attached. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Elisabeth Plumlee-Watson