

Ohio Public Health Policy Committee
May 24, 2023

Opponent testimony, HB 68

Chair Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and Members of the Ohio House Public Health Policy Committee:

My name is Caitlin Feasby and I am a MSW (Master of Social Work) in Ohio. As social workers, we aim to provide care which is patient-centered and treats individuals by addressing a person's emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual needs. In mental health care, we call this a "holistic" approach, with a focus on treating the whole person, not just their diagnoses or symptoms. Most of us have benefitted from working with a physical or mental health provider who does not just check boxes on a form, but takes the time to talk with you, understand your needs, and develops an individualized treatment plan which is tailored to you.

In much the same way, gender-affirming care is also patient-centered. It is small, incremental, and interpersonal. This style of care allows a person whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth to meet with a mental health practitioner, be given resources, get connected to a community, and/or receive assistance navigating difficult conversations at home or at school. Gender-affirming care allows mental health practitioners to help kids understand their feelings, identify their strengths, and build resiliency.

For children and adolescents who are gender diverse, early access to gender-affirming care is essential to overall health and well-being, as these interventions support a child or adolescent as they navigate social transitions, increasing self-efficacy while simultaneously enhancing confidence while navigating the healthcare system later in life. By supporting gender-affirming care, you make healthcare and mental healthcare more available and supportive to individuals with a wide range of needs.

The very supports that HB 68 intends to limit for transgender and non-binary children and adolescents are the same treatments which are overwhelmingly available for individuals who identify with their sex assigned at birth. Anti-androgen hormone therapy is a treatment widely available for cis-gender women to combat acne or female pattern hair loss - similarly, this hormone is also the recommended treatment for trans women who wish to block the production of testosterone. Hormones estrogen and progestin, widely used for male-to-female transitions, are also the primary hormone treatments for cis-gender women seeking treatment for polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

Testosterone is not only readily accessible to cis-gender female body-builders to build muscle mass, but is also the primary treatment for "Low-T" or low-Testosterone in cis-men. The Columbus Men's Clinic not only boasts ease of access to testosterone supplements for men experiencing low-T in central Ohio, but also promotes discrete care while in a "comfortable

environment with TVs featuring sports and other men's interest channels, magazines, and short wait times."

This is gender-affirming care. From treating medical conditions like PCOS or low-T to more nuanced physical characteristics such as mitigating female baldness or acne, gender-affirming care encompasses all interventions designed to help an individual connect in a more meaningful way with their gender identity. Bills like HB 68 are not only unnecessary, they are explicitly discriminatory against gender diverse individuals.

Are these bills designed to protect children, or to protect Ohio's systemic fragility? How can we support a cohort of future adults if we teach them they are unacceptable unless they conform to the strong-arming of those in positions of power who are not willing to listen? HB 68 is not only heinous in its exclusion of people who deserve rights and protections, it is short-sighted. No amount of legislation is going to override the existence of gender diverse children and adolescents. This legislation is dangerous for kids and explicitly marginalizes Ohio's gender diverse communities.

In September 2022, Governor Mike DeWine was quoted as saying he "[has] a vision for Ohio to be the best place in the nation to have a baby and raise a family." If passed, HB 68 will be a clear indication that the state of Ohio and Governor DeWine's vision does not include children who are gender questioning or gender non-confirming. This bill promotes fear mongering and continues to divide our state by intentionally pitting people against one another at the expense of Ohio's children.