

Trans kids are kids ... period. They deserve the love, support, affirmation, help and guidance that any other kid should expect from their parents, their community, school, church and government. Enacting laws that prohibit care, discussion or even acknowledgement for transgender kids is not only irresponsible but harmful for trans kids and their families. It is already hard enough for kids growing up in today's world and near impossible for those who question their own identity and struggle to understand why the person looking back at them from the mirror doesn't fit with who they think they are. Trans kids, just like any other, look to the adults in their lives to help them figure out what is going on and to provide love and support as they mature. Whether it is a boy or girl asking questions about puberty or asking why they do not feel like their gender on the inside matches what they see on the outside, it is up to ALL OF US as the adults in their lives to guide and support them and bring any and all tools we have as a society to help them.

Gender dysphoria is real. Many children, like my son, struggle with this at a time in their life when they are not equipped to deal with it. Behavioral and mental health struggles are real as well and many trans kids, like my son, have severe depression and anxiety issues. I can only imagine how hard it is for a trans kid trying to understand why they feel the way they do and at the same time seeing every day on tv and on social media, people trying to invalidate who they are as if they are some kind of harm to society or that they are bad people. I would be depressed too, and I am depressed as a parent seeing my child have to experience this. Trans kids are kids ... period. Studies show that more than half of trans kids suffer from severe depression and have attempted or made plans to attempt suicide. They need our help and need access to mental health professionals who are versed in the challenges that children with gender dysphoria are experiencing. This legislation would make getting our kids the help they need even more difficult than it already is. Without proper support from families, schools, communities and our government, trans kids will be at further risk for developing mental illness and substance abuse issues. The recently published report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provide more detail than I can discuss in the short time I have about the devastating impacts not properly supporting the transgender community can have. This so-called "SAFE Act" is far from being safe. It is very harmful to some of the most vulnerable children in our care.

In regard to treatments that this "SAFE Act" would prohibit, I would encourage you all to talk to the parents of transgender children about the care and deliberate nature which the great health care professionals take to ensure that children receive the right care. Parents can't take their kids to the family doctor and get a referral for hormones or a gender-affirming surgery. Kids can't drop by a clinic on their own after school and ask for gender affirming medical treatments. That is a misconception and a scare tactic that trick parents into thinking that their children are at risk somehow of getting treatment that they don't want. Ignoring the challenges of finding someone to even talk to you child about gender dysphoria in Ohio today, once you do find a provider, there are many, many steps in very well documented standards of care that need to be taken before any hormone or other medical treatment is taken. Medical professionals are very deliberate in ensuring that a child's mental health and understanding about their gender dysphoria are understood first and then, and only then, are medical options such as puberty-blocking treatments discussed. Surgeries are not recommended by many standards of care for children under the age of 18 so banning them as part of HB68 further supports that this bill is only meant to ostracize and invalidate the transgender youth in our state. Blocking access to treatments, including mental health support, is unfair, inhumane and will only stand to harm our transgender youth.

Lastly, as a parent of a child and a citizen of the state of Ohio, this bill and others like it that supposedly support parent's rights does exactly the opposite. This bill says, we as the state of Ohio, support your rights as a parent if and only if you agree with our perception of what a child should be and how you as a parent should raise them. I did not ask my child to be transgender, he did wake up one day and think "wow it would be cool to be a trans kid," we as a family did not ask for him to experience depression as a teenage and make an attempt to end his own life but what I am doing is supporting my child, fighting for him and all the children like him in the state of Ohio to have access to the care, support and love that they, like all kids, deserve. Transgender kids are just kids. How dare you try to erase who they are and take away the care that they desperately need and deserve.

I would encourage you all to spend your time debating issues and raising legislation that impacts more than 0.6% of the population and actually aims to improve the lives of Ohioans.