

Chair Lipps, Vice-Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston and members of the Public Health Policy Committee, my name is Mikael McLaren, and I am the proud father of a transgender daughter and I oppose HB 68.

I am here to plead for my daughter's right to exist. She has always known who she is, and as an identical twin, is in a position where two identical kids, in identical surroundings, and identical opportunities branched out into two very different individuals. She is living her best life right now, to the best of her abilities, despite living in a world where legislative bodies are doing their best to minimize and gatekeep her joy. Conner is an empath, and feeds on the emotions of those who surround her, and she wants only for people to find joy.

Despite what we have heard about Transgender kids, Conner is a happy, healthy teenager who has been accepted, with scholarships, into her top choice college's highly competitive Mechanical Engineering program. As her father, I am extremely happy for her, not only because she was accepted into her dream school, but because it is in a state that is far more affirming of who she is. I see the writing on the wall, and I know that despite my efforts, and those who also have happy and healthy children who happen to be transgender, Ohio is headed to legislating away my child's joy.

I look at this situation pretty simply. Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, but bills like this make it impossible for my daughter to live authentically. I see politicians who do not have an ounce of medical training interfering with my right as a parent, and acting as if they know how to raise and support my child better than I do. It can be hard to understand what it's like to have a transgender child. Simply, I want what is best for my child, which **includes** ensuring that she can receive the medical care she needs.

The medical care that my daughter has received has enabled her to thrive and have a happy and healthy childhood. This in no small part, has allowed her to become the success that she has become. Children like my daughter, like all kids, have the best chance to thrive when they are supported, and this includes getting the prescribed medical care they need, when they need it. This bill would effectively eliminate that care. Bills like this are putting the well-being of kids like mine at risk. I consider myself lucky; my daughter is going to be 18 soon, and out, at least for now, the reach of intrusive legislative bills like this one. This bill takes away access to medically necessary, safe health care backed by research and supported by every major medical association representing over 1.3 million doctors. This bill would punish doctors who are following standards of medical care for transgender patients; standards that are endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association and all the other leading medical authorities.

We don't need to understand everything about each other to treat each other with dignity and respect. We all want to be valued and accepted for who we know we are. I think we can all agree that it is wrong to single out and attack anyone, including transgender people, for simply living their lives and being who they are. We need more love, empathy and kindness and we need to let people find their joy.

Transgender people are my daughter, our friends, our family, our colleagues and our community members. We need to offer space and grace to everyone.