

To say that gender transition, in particular hormone replacement therapy or surgery, is a “miracle” would be laughably naive and blatantly false. But to pretend that it cannot work miracles— that would be to ignore the profound effect it has had on my life. I wake up each morning in a body that fits like a glove, I bring “Home” with me everywhere in the form of a 19-year-old man, and every time I look in the mirror, I see *my own face* staring back at me.

To any self-assured person out there, that might not sound like anything special. But to me, it represents years of perseverance and bravery. It’s difficult to describe the feeling of waking up each morning and looking at a stranger in the mirror, of being unable to find yourself in the reflection because what you see is a distorted collection of features that belong to someone else. It’s difficult to describe the experience of making yourself small around others not out of insecurity, but because everyone who greets you is looking at a costume you inhabit, not a real person. It’s difficult to describe the experience of growing up, feeling like you don’t belong in your own body and every day it turns more and more against you, being confused because your peers don’t feel the way you do, and there is no explanation to give you comfort. But these are feelings that every trans youth in Ohio knows intimately.

I went on testosterone at 16. It was the last option of many that I tried to improve my quality of life, and one I discussed for months with doctors, friends, family, and therapists. I won’t pretend I wasn’t terrified. But it was the best decision I’ve ever made, one that changed me in every way for the better. As my body changed, I could feel myself growing more confident, more self-assured, and more like myself every day.

There's no way for me to express the feeling of finally seeing *yourself* in your own reflection.

I can't be there in person today because I've just had top surgery, another wonderful step in my transition, but I'm imploring every Ohio lawmaker to think of teenagers like me. I'm not unique in my story, and I have dozens of trans friends who've had the same life-changing experience.

Transition *isn't* for everyone. Medical transition, especially. But every trans person out there deserves the chance at it, if it's what they need. This is most true for the teenagers, like me, who are at their most vulnerable. I know it's scary to let vulnerable people make big decisions, but we aren't making them alone. We're making them with our doctors and our therapists, the people who are the most qualified to help us make those choices. Just like any antidepressant, lack of access to medical and mental health treatment can be life-endangering. And just like any antidepressant—any medication at *all*—the only people relevant to a teenager's medical and mental health treatment are the patient and their medical professionals.

Keep trans teens like me safe. Keep us with the people who know best for us—our doctors— not legislators who have no right to make medical and mental health decisions for us. We aren't being experimented on. We're being given treatment.

Don't hurt us. Don't *ban* us. *Help* us. Please.