

**Opponent Testimony for HB 68
Senate Health Committee
May 34, 2023**

**Ari Faber, Founding Member
Athenians for Bodily Autonomy**

Chairman Lipps, Representative Click, and members of the Public Health Policy Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today on HB68. My name is Ari Faber, my pronouns are he/they, and I am a concerned Ohioan, a trans-masculine individual, and an active and engaged member of my local community. I work at United Campus Ministry Center in Athens and am a member of Athenians for Bodily Autonomy.

I am here today to advocate for the children in the position I was once in and to show young members of my community that they are loved, valued, and that there is a place for them here in Ohio. To remind them that there are people who cherish and accept them for who they are.

I grew up in an incredibly conservative, Pentecostal household before attending Cedarville University, a small Christian school that is consistently ranked among the top five most conservative schools in the country. Growing up I could never shake this feeling that there was something deeply and horrifically wrong with me. It never occurred to me that I could be anything other than cisgender. It simply was not an option. As I entered middle school, this feeling intensified and I began to struggle with major depression, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, and an eating disorder that has nearly taken my life more than once and resulted in permanent health issues. During puberty when my body started to change I became incredibly dysphoric and began referring to my chest as a parasite. I often expressed a desire for a breast reduction down to the smallest possible size. It still did not occur to me that I could be transgender. It was absolutely not on the table. For 7 years I self-harmed almost daily, experienced suicidal ideation nearly every moment I was awake, and engaged in eating disorder behaviors to varying degrees. I tried everything I could to help myself, from faith-based counseling to secular therapy, medication, and more. Nothing I did seemed to help until I had a major change in my worldview. It was a long and slow road, but I eventually concluded that 1) it was not sinful to be part of the LGBTQ+ community and 2) even if it was, I could not force other people to adhere to my personal religious beliefs. It was even longer before I began to question and eventually grow to accept and love my own gender identity. Only after this happened did my mental

health begin to improve, despite the numerous challenges I've faced since then. My pain does not come from being transgender, but from the near-constant conflict with my biological family, lack of access to medical transition, and the bombardment of messaging coming from bills such as this very one that says my elected officials and those that support them would rather see me and my community dead than thriving as our authentic selves. That is the message this bill sends to the entirety of the transgender community. Voting for this bill sends the message to transgender youth that there is no place for them in Ohio, that we do not want or care for them, that the world would be better off without them in it. People are fleeing from the states in which legislation such as HB68 is enacted. If we want our children and families to continue living in Ohio, HB68 cannot pass.

Young children are not medically transitioning. Once they begin to show signs of puberty they are given puberty blockers, the same medication cisgender children are given if they start going through puberty too young. Puberty blockers are 100% reversible and only delay the onset of puberty. Children cannot access a mastectomy or breast augmentation until they are older and then only with parental consent. Cisgender teens are also undergoing breast augmentations and reductions at the same ages, but this bill would not deny them access to the same procedures. Additionally, many health insurers will not cover these procedures for transgender individuals until they are an adult.

Recommendations and guidelines clearly state that transgender individuals should not undergo bottom surgery until they reach 18 and I have never heard of an individual undergoing these procedures at an earlier age despite scouring every corner of the internet. After reading many peer-reviewed articles the highest detransition rate I could find was just over 10% and of that 10% nearly 90% detransitioned due to societal, partner, and familial stressors and pressure. This means that only 1% of all transgender people regret their decisions and detransition. Studies clearly confirm that access to gender-affirming care saves lives and improves the quality of life of transgender children. Several recent studies show that access to gender-affirming care leads to a 60% reduction in depression and suicidal ideation.

You have the power to decide if Ohio is a state in which our differences are celebrated or hidden in fear of becoming the next victim of a hate crime. You have the responsibility of determining if children and their parents have the right to make personal medical decisions under the guidance of licensed healthcare providers without the state becoming involved and the right to bodily autonomy. If you are truly thinking of the children when voting on this bill, keep in mind that gender-affirming care is life-saving and leads to a better quality of life for transgender youth.

Voting for HB68 is consenting to the death of transgender children. I wonder constantly how different my life would look if I had grown up in an environment where I was able to

explore my gender identity and access gender-affirming care at a younger age. How much more could I have accomplished had I not been a mere shell of a human for so much of my life? I never in a million years would have imagined this is what my life would look like or that I would be accomplishing all my goals and dreams. Transgender children deserve to grow into transgender adults who accomplish their wildest dreams, love their lives, and think about how grateful they are to be alive every single day. Please, consider my testimony and vote no on HB 68.

Thank you for your time. I can now take any questions.