

Find Your Way Counseling & Consulting LLC

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Date: 5/23/2023

RE: HB68

To: Chair Lipps

Vice-Chair Stewart

Ranking Member Liston

Members of the Public Health Policy Committee

My name is Nern Ostendorf and I am a full-time private practice therapist and partner at Find Your Way Counseling & Consulting LLC. I have a Masters degree in Social Work from the University of Cincinnati and am actively licensed as a Social Worker in Ohio. I am also an Ohio resident. I began working with Find Your Way Counseling & Consulting in May of 2022. I was employed full time at Central Clinic Behavioral Health from 2018-2022 as both a case manager and therapist. I have specialized my practice to provide mental health care to LGBTQ+ adolescents and adults.

I am writing this testimony in opposition of HB68. Banning access to affirming and necessary mental health and medical care for transgender minors not only goes against medical advice, it also significantly and negatively impacts psychological outcomes for this population. As a licensed social worker who has worked directly with the transgender and gender non-conforming population for 5 years, I have significant experience in understanding Gender Dysphoria, co-morbid mental health diagnoses and helping my clients be well-adjusted, happy, healthy and safe individuals. When I meet with a client and their family, I perform a thorough evaluation and make treatment recommendations based on the best available evidence for that individual's situation. In my experience, parents/caregivers do the best they can, often in difficult circumstances, to make decisions they believe are in their child's best interest. These parents and their child, along with their mental health provider and doctor should be able to make decisions about their healthcare.

Licensed and trained professionals, such as physicians, licensed therapists, clinical counselors and psychologists, etc., are equipped to follow standards of care guidelines, offer guidance and support for the LGBTQ population and make qualified and ethical decisions for readiness for affirming care for minors. Guidelines from the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), the National Endocrine Society and the American Psychological Association, to name a few, exist to provide a blueprint for providing affirming care to transgender minors. The Ohio General Assembly should leave

the practice of medicine to licensed healthcare providers. I am gravely concerned that HB68 sets a dangerous precedent by interfering with medical decision making and parent/caregiver autonomy to discuss care options in consultation with their child's medical provider.

HB68 would place mental health and medical professionals in an ethical dilemma: we would have to refrain from providing evidence-based care to patients struggling with a diagnosis of gender dysphoria or lose our medical license. **I cannot imagine another diagnosis where a state law would prohibit us from delivering evidence-based care.**

In a time when the demand for child and adolescent mental health care is at its highest, HB68 makes the demand even higher. I address patients' mental health every day. Trans youth who are persistent, consistent and insistent about their gender identity have positive psychosocial outcomes when they are able to live authentically in their mind and body, which is what affirming care helps them to do. My client population has high rates of depression and anxiety which are further exacerbated when not treated by affirming care and acceptance. I was trained to treat the whole child; ignoring a child's mental health or a diagnosis like gender dysphoria is simply not responsible care.

I implore you to vote no on HB68. This bill sets a dangerous precedent.

Sincerely,

Nern Ostendorf MSW, LSW

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