

May 23, 2023

Chairperson Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Public Health Policy Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is René Hick, my pronouns are she/her/hers and I strongly oppose House Bill 68 which would ban gender affirming care for minors in Ohio.

I am testifying today because the arguments presented during proponent testimony do not resonate with my family's lived experience with gender affirming care here in Ohio. Our son came out to us at the age of sixteen and while I never doubted his ability to speak his own truth, as a parent the need to understand what this meant for him was overwhelming. But as a nurse and early childhood educator, I was able to rely on my formal education about human growth and development and my experience adhering to clinical care standards and medical best practice to guide my search for education and information.

What I learned is that the three leading medical authorities (The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Academy of Pediatrics and The American Medical Association) all endorse gender affirming care as evidence-based clinical care. It is patient-centered and treats individuals holistically, aligning their outward, physical traits with their gender identity.

What did gender affirming care look like for our family? Our son already had an established relationship with a licensed mental health counselor. This therapeutic relationship continued both individually and together as a family as we navigated his transition journey. He started his transition socially by aligning his outward appearance with his gender identity prior to considering any medical intervention, following well established guidelines for gender affirming care.

Through this social transition we started to see fewer signs of anxiety, depression and thoughts of self harm. He was then referred to his pediatrician as well as a pediatric adolescent medicine specialist with experience in caring for transgender youth and young adults. With these pediatricians, we carefully weighed the risks and benefits of medical hormonal treatment and spent many hours discussing these choices with our son and his trusted team of medical professionals.

The healthcare decisions we made on this years-long journey were not rash nor taken lightly. They were made carefully over time following established guidelines with input from a multidisciplinary care team. We were not manipulated, brainwashed or victims of social media propaganda. Each decision was made based on a set of guidelines and involved some waiting, but not the type of waiting that discounts the reality of the negative mental health impacts for transgender youth or implies a distrust of our son's knowledge about his own body or infringes on his right to bodily autonomy.

The gender affirming care my son received was critical not only to his survival but also his ability to thrive once again. He graduated from high school as a scholar athlete and in the top ten

percent of his class. He earned achievement as well as academic scholarships upon his admission to college where he is currently finishing his junior year as a Dean's List recipient each quarter he has attended. He is flourishing living as his authentic self.

At its core, House Bill 68 infringes on a parent's right to make decisions about their children's healthcare as well as their children's right to bodily autonomy.

All of the leading medical authorities oppose any governmental intrusion into the practice of medicine that is detrimental to the health of transgender and gender-diverse children and adults. Gender diverse adolescents, in particular, face significant health disparities compared to their cis gender peers making gender affirming care medically necessary care. Life saving care for our transgender youth.

This bill does not protect children, it does harm.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this dangerous bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.