

Testimony of Nick Zingarelli Against House Bill 68

My name is Nick Zingarelli and I appreciate being provided with the opportunity to speak in opposition to House Bill 68. I am testifying in my individual capacity and not on behalf of my employer.

I was born in Columbus, Ohio. I received my bachelor's degree from the University of Cincinnati. I work as an attorney in Cincinnati. My child was born in Cincinnati and aspires to be a Bearcat, just like her parents.

From the time our child was born, we called our child our son. We did this because we had limited information to work from. But over the course of our child's life, our child found ways to tell us that this was not her truth. Our child loved to grow her hair long and have her fingernails painted. Our child loved to wear my wife's jewelry. Our child would be misgendered in public and it never bothered her. Our child loves the color pink so much that she insisted on having her room painted pink. Our child loves unicorns. About three weeks before she came out to her mom and me, we went shopping for Christmas decorations for our front lawn. Our child's choice was an inflatable unicorn with a rainbow that said "Merry Christmas."

We moved to St. Louis in 2019 because my wife always wanted to be close to her large family that lives there. The week before Christmas in 2020, our child gave us a letter that my wife and I were required to read together. She came out to

us as transgender. She signed the letter “your daughter.” She had given us all of the signs and clues to guide us along the way and then ultimately had the courage to confirm this reality.

Over the next year, a lot happened and yet not much at all happened. We had her name and gender pronouns changed through her school. Her school supported us on her journey. We had her regularly meet with a counselor. Her counselor supported her. She came out to friends and family. They supported her. We met with a doctor at St. Louis Children’s Hospital, who told us that there was nothing to be done until she started puberty.

After our daughter came out, we met parents of other transgender kids, who educated us on the fight that is required to make sure that your child can be their true selves in Missouri. My wife traveled to Missouri’s capital city of Jefferson City in 2021 to testify against bills just like the one that is before the committee today. She told the legislature of the stress and anxiety of proposed laws that take away our daughter's right to receive the medical care that she needs. I traveled to Jefferson City to testify against four separate bills in 2022.

The legislative session in Missouri lasts from January through May. During those months, we worried constantly about whether today would be the day that some kind of unfair and exclusionary legislation would be passed. No legislation was passed in 2022 that affected the rights of transgender youth. However, we saw

the writing on the wall and decided to move back to Cincinnati. The Missouri governor just signed a bill that will significantly limit youth's access to transgender care and puts Missouri on a path to eliminating it altogether.

Let's address the elephant in the room. There are claims that transgender children are prescribed medication too soon and without appropriate oversight. This is not something that anyone in our community wants. Gender affirming care is not something to be taken lightly. If there are bad actors, the specific conduct of those bad actors should be addressed. However, the answer to this alleged problem is not to eliminate an essential form of health care for a marginalized community.

The experience that my family has had with gender affirming care and the experiences that so many other families have had is measured, careful, caring, and professional. We have worked with two different hospitals: St. Louis Children's Hospital and Cincinnati Children's Hospital. Both were outstanding with us. Our child was in counseling for over a year before any medical intervention occurred and that was for a single puberty blocker. In the two and a half years since our child came out, we have had one medical intervention versus countless counseling sessions and multiple doctor's appointments to make sure that our child remains on a healthy trajectory.

There's more than one elephant to address, and that is the organizations that advance this legislation. One of the key supporters of this bill is the American

College of Pediatricians. This is a splinter group from the American Academy of Pediatrics. The American Academy of Pediatrics is comprised of over 78,000 medical professionals who support the principle that transgender youth should have access to gender affirming care. The American College of Pediatricians has less than 1% of the membership of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The American College of Pediatricians has been designated as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center and was born from the idea that same sex couples should not be able to adopt children. Another supporter is “Mission America,” another anti-LGBTQ hate group as designated by the Southern Poverty Law Center. And let’s not forget the infamous “Demon Dude” that testified at an earlier committee hearing. These are the supporters for this legislation.

We decided to move back to Cincinnati for a lot of reasons but, ultimately, it’s because Ohio is our home. We chose to move back to Ohio because I know this state is a more inclusive and welcoming place than where we left. The Ohio where I grew up and that I have always been so proud to call my home state would not pass unnecessary laws that infringe on the privacy that should exist between a child, the child’s parents, and the child’s doctors.

Common sense prevailed when this bill appeared before an Ohio legislative committee this past fall. Please ensure that this bill meets a similar fate. Please vote no on HB 68. Thank you.