

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Public Health Committee thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 68. My name is Andrew Lehman, a lifetime resident of Columbus, Ohio and current college student at the Ohio State University.

Today is the first time I have ever provided testimony to members of the Ohio General Assembly. I have made this effort to stand-up for friends, classmates and strangers who wish for an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties. Additionally, I am here before you today to share my perspective on this bill. Right now, we are living in a time of reactionary fear to change and the unpredictability of the near future. I believe this bill is rooted in parental misunderstanding and fear for children in Generation Z and Alpha who are growing up in a landscape of gender as a social construct rather than defined by hormones and genitalia.

I am concerned about Section 1 and the language proposed for sections to be added to the Ohio Revised Code, especially for sections 3109.054 (c), 3129.06, and 3129.07. I am concerned that this bill creates barriers to professional counseling to help guide these individuals to help them find their identity. First, giving parents, who may be challenged with lack of knowledge, experience and understanding of gender fluidity, will prevent these individuals the opportunity to work with counselors. Second, imposing additional requirements and restrictions on these qualified medical professionals will reduce the number of available and willing counselors to work with these individuals. I am also concerned about the language included in Section 2. For example, some of the language is hurtful and not true for the trans community. It is harmful to imply that trans kids will likely regret their transition and being trans is an endemic problem that could spread at any moment. Additionally, it is hurtful and creates additionally stigma to assume that trans kids are simply going through a phase or that they have a mental health issue.

When you cite suicide and trauma as causations, you need to consider the possibility that queer and trans-kids act out of fear of the repercussions of outing themselves as trans/gender non-conforming and instead choose to suffer in silence. Also, you may need to consider that much of the data that is found to be written by medical professionals support that gender-affirming surgeries does decrease suicidal ideation in adults by a significant percentage. This bill seems like a step towards removing that surgery option for adults as well when you hint at the “ineffectiveness” of these surgeries.

I strongly oppose HB 68 and urge members of this committee and the Ohio General Assembly to oppose this harmful legislation. At a minimum, I request that this committee at least modifies this bill to remove the barriers for kids to be able to receive guidance from medical and mental health professionals about their body dysmorphia. This will help them find a path that best helps them move forward in confirming their identity without worry of being denied their own existence.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in opposition to HB 68. I urge members of this committee and the Ohio General Assembly to oppose this harmful legislation.