

5/21/23

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RE: Ohio HB 68 Ohio Saving Adolescents from Experimentation (SAFE) Act

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

My name is Jody Davis. I am a Registered Nurse at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, and the LGBTQ Veteran Care Coordinator at the Columbus Ohio Veterans Health Administration. I am originally from Cincinnati, Ohio.

I grew up Catholic. I knew I had gender issues starting around age 5 or 6, but it was the 1970s and I didn't have the words for what I was going through.

I suffered greatly from not understanding myself, and I was bullied from a young age for being effeminate. Kids can be cruel, and I was emotionally, physically, and even sexually abused in high school. I was an easy target.

Right after high school, I joined the U.S. Army. I joined to pay for college, and also thought maybe joining the military would somehow help me be a better man, and stop these gender issues.

But things like sexual orientation and gender identity and Part of Us. They can Not be fixed. They can Not be legislated away. As a young adult, I went to a Christian counselor who tried what I later learned was Conversion Therapy. It didn't work, it only made me hate myself even more.

Well after my military service, I finally had the courage to love myself enough to accept myself as a transgender woman. Coming out was one of the hardest things I have ever done. It cost me a marriage, a church, estrangement from my family, I had to move and nearly lost custody of my child.

As an Independently licensed social worker in the state of Ohio, I have worked in several organizations here in Columbus providing counseling for transgender people. These organizations have included Clintonville Counseling and Wellness, Equitas Health, Equality Ohio, at Ohio State and at the VA.

I have worked with clients as young as 8 years old, up until 80 years old. I know most of the staff at Nationwide Children's Hospital Thrive program, and some staff at Cincinnati and Akron children's hospitals. I have written over a hundred of what we call WPATH letters, letters with a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, stating that interventions are medically necessary to treat these patients.

It is a wonderful thing, an honor to work with anxious, withdrawn and sometimes suicidal people struggling with their gender identities, and to be able to help them get treatment and become happy, outgoing and well-adjusted members of our society.

I have heard so many heartwrenching stories of veterans who served under Don't Ask Don't Tell, and were interrogated, humiliated, and discharged for just being gay or trans, for just being themselves.

Do we really want to try and legislate away the tools of the trade that help transgender people, including teenage children? Do we really want to go against what the APA, the AMA, the Ohio Hospital Association, Ohio Psychologists, and so many other medical professionals who support gender affirming care for adolescents and adults?

Do we really want to strip parents of their freedoms to raise children as they see fit, and help them get the treatment they need? Can the state somehow know better than parents and the medical professionals that are trained to care for these people?

This does NOT KEEP CHILDREN SAFE, this ENDANGERS them. This gives other students, school administrators and other parents the signal that transphobia, that discrimination, that bullying is A OK according to the state we all have to live in. This will cause some families who can afford to, to leave the state, while those without the means will suffer even further.

Do you think larger corporations with diverse workforces are going to want to come here? Do you think Intel is still going to make such a huge investment in Ohio, when some of their workforce will refuse to move to a state where their children may be in danger?

Thanks for listening to me and to all the voices this morning, calling for Opposition to HB 68.

*Jody E Davis*

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