

Opponent Testimony for HB68

House Public Health Policy Committee

5/24/2023

Natalie Flanagan

Citizen

Thank you, Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, and Ranking Member Liston for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Natalie Flanagan. I'm a Catholic, I'm a sibling, I'm a daughter, I'm a girlfriend, I'm an Ohioan, I'm transgender, and I stand firmly in opposition to HB68.

I come from humble beginnings. My dad was an auto mechanic and my mom was a waitress. Around age 10, one day everything clicked. I knew who I was and who I ought to be. I'd never met a transgender person. Nobody ever talked to me about them in school. This was before *Obergefell*, so it wasn't even really in the public consciousness. For the next couple of years, I struggled to admit it to myself, debated telling my parents and peers, and tried to cope with the intense gender dysphoria all at once. The difficulty of even telling my parents kept me awake at night. I certainly did not need the state telling me how to feel.

It wasn't until I was 15 that I finally decided to say something to my parents. This was during September of my Sophomore year of high school. At this point, I had switched from public schooling to an all-boys Catholic high school. I told my folks that I was transgender, and not knowing what to do, they decided the best thing was to keep things the way they were until I was an adult.

I fell into a spiral. I didn't have anyone to talk to about it except a few friends. I developed a habit of self-harm, and I became increasingly suicidal. I learned how to tie a noose. A few months later on a Sunday night, I had mentioned my suicidal ideation to a friend. He decided it was in my best interest if I were to go to the hospital, and that I also did not get a choice. I had already gotten in bed that night, I remember hearing the sirens, then the dispatcher called me. Then I walked out into the living room to see the devastated look on my parents' faces. I remember telling them that they were here for me. I remember getting patted down, my neighbors standing in the windows watching the whole scene, and getting put in the back of a squad car to be taken to St. Charles Hospital.

They let me out, and in a few days, I had a therapist. God bless my therapist. My first session, I told her that I did not expect to live until the end of high school. From there began a long journey of coping with everything I had struggled with. If it were not for my therapist and my ability to

talk about my issues with gender with her, I would have killed myself. Therapy changed my life, and regarding this bill, specifically Sec. 3129.03, I'm afraid that I would not have gotten the opportunity to receive this care.

"Sec. 3129.03.

(Starts at Line 130) (1) Notwithstanding section 5122.04 of the Revised Code, obtaining the consent of the minor individual's residential parent and the legal custodian or the minor individual's guardian;

(Starts at Line 141) (B) No political subdivision may prohibit the use of watchful waiting, treatment and therapies similar to those provided for the treatment of body dysmorphia and eating disorders, or other models of care that assist minor individuals experiencing a gender-related condition in reconciling their gender identity with their biological sex."

My process to determine what was right for my life was uniquely mine. I explored my Catholic faith, even going as far as living with an order of priests, totally immersed in the faith, all to make sure any choice I made was the correct one. I had talked to my friends, my family, clergy, and mental health providers before I decided to seek the medical care I have now. What I did not need to do was to consult the state of Ohio. This body has no place in this aspect of my personal affairs.

I've been on hormones for over a year and a half as an adult, and I'm the happiest I've ever been in my life. I wish that the younger me could see me now and know that everything ended up okay. Gender-affirming care has saved my life, and under this bill, I may not have gotten it.

I'm asking you to keep big government out of the lives of Ohioans like myself, my family, and thousands of other families across this state. The doctors of this state can regulate these practices as they have for almost everything else.

I'm asking you to do right by Ohio's families and stop the madness and the assault on us. Why should we have to argue for this in front of the Public Health Committee when Doctors and mental health professionals have debated this and come to conclusions for decades?

This is absolute nonsense being inserted into the lives of hard-working Ohioans. I've lived to tell my story, I've consulted my bases, and the state of Ohio shouldn't have played a role in it. Please vote in opposition to this bill, so that kids like me have a chance to grow up without the challenges I had.