

June 14, 2023

Renee Westermeyer, pronouns she/her

HB68 Ohio Ban on Gender Affirming Care

Opponent Testimony

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

I am a friend, family relation and ally to those in the transgender and non-binary community. I am also the spouse of a retired Air Force Officer. I strongly oppose HB 68, a bill that would strip away the parental and guardian rights from those within our state's borders, including military families, and prevent their children from gaining access to healthcare as they see fit.

I volunteered for four years with a peer lead support group in the Dayton area for transgender/non-binary adults, youths and their family members or guardians. I have listened to numerous accounts of the hardships and many times mental anguish that they experience at the hands of those in the community such as peers, teachers, religious leaders, civic leaders such as yourselves, and sometimes even family members that are unwilling to see them as the wonderfully unique humans that they are, all worthy of the same rights and respect as the rest of us. Based on my experience with the support group, I could attest to the terrible effects on a child's mental health, schooling and general wellbeing that withholding gender affirming care can have on them and their family however, I will leave that to the many professionals in the field that you have heard from previously or will hear testimony from today.

I am here to address another negative effect this bill would have on our state. The U.S. military is one of the largest employers in Ohio, with Wright-Patterson Air Force Base alone employing over 30,000. [Militaryonesource.mil](https://www.militaryonesource.mil) estimates that another 54,000 retirees use the services of the base. That means there are roughly 84,000 families that call the Greater Dayton and Miami Valley area home due to the Air Force Base and this includes a portion of my representative, Chair Lipps, and all of committee member White's districts.

While volunteering with the support group, I met many families that had a direct connection to the Air Force base. Active-duty personnel and even some civilian or contract workers have little to no say in where they and their families are stationed. Due to military funding cuts, dependents of active duty and retirees must often use off base facilities that are bound by state laws for their specialized health care. If this bill passes, military families that are currently stationed here or those that must move to Ohio with a child already receiving gender affirming care would be forced to make the terrible decision of either splitting up their family to live in separate states so their child can continue to receive the care that they as parents deem appropriate or separate from the military to keep their family together, thus losing their livelihood. Our active military, retirees and their families make many sacrifices for our country so that we all can enjoy the same rights and freedoms. They having to move from one state to another should not put their military career, parental rights or family's wellbeing in jeopardy.

If we are in fact the "United" States, we should all have the freedom to move from state to state without sacrificing parental rights when it comes to our children's healthcare. Don't let Ohio be unwelcoming to military families and others. I urge you to vote no on HB68.