

To Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and Members of the House Public Policy Committee;

I'm writing in opposition to HB 68. During the last Opponent Testimony Hearing for this bill, the same two questions were asked repeatedly of the people testifying. I'd like to address those questions as a parent who has made the decisions alluded to during the treatment of my transgender child.

The questions were "Do you believe it's okay to remove a perfectly healthy limb?" and "Do you believe it should be legal in Ohio to remove the breasts or penis of a 15 year old?" These questions are an oversimplification of a complex issue. Also, they attempt to address surgeries that are not being done, or are very rarely done, on kids within Ohio. If this committee or certain members are focusing so much attention on the surgical interventions of mastectomy or genital surgery, why is this bill also trying to make nonsurgical interventions illegal?

To answer the question of removing a perfectly healthy limb, I will always answer "Yes, after years of counseling, trying all the medications, trying all the treatments, and seeing multiple doctors; if my teen is still actively suicidal because his "limb" feels wrong, deformed, and diseased to him, I will always choose to save my child's life over his "limb". He can live without an arm, but he can't live with the arm if he has killed himself.

We were on suicide watch with my child for about two years. Until you have focused every breath you take on keeping your child breathing, you cannot know how desperate you can feel. It means everything to have family support, school support, and the medical care of counselors, pediatricians, psychiatrists, endocrinologists, and social workers to help fight for your child's life. As we emerged from his mental health crisis with a newly recognized sense of gender diversity, having social support groups for him and for us helped us all recover, learn, and grow together. Because he started hormone blockers at 14, then HRT at 15, we have been able to see him grow up into a young adult, ready to move out and give back to society. Recognizing who he is, and having a supportive, affirming environment has relieved the suicidal ideation and cutting that controlled and threatened his early teen years. He still has depression and anxiety that is medication non responsive; but he has learned how to manage his inherited mental health conditions. He's not transgender because he's depressed/anxious, he's transgender and has depression/anxiety episodes.

To answer the question of "Should it be legal in Ohio to remove the breasts or penis of a 15 year old?"; my answer is yes, as it should be left up to the parents and medical team of a child to determine the best care for their child. Again, if I

have to choose between my child's life and removing his breasts, I am choosing to save his life. I can't believe that anyone would choose to save breasts instead of a person. The person's life should always be more important than any of their parts. This question is misleading; neither of these procedures is available for children in Ohio, as far as I'm aware. I'm active in several parents of transgender children support groups (Federally, State-wide, and Locally) and none of the parents that I know have had any surgical interventions done for their child within Ohio. None of the parents that I know have had genital surgery done as part of their child's care. I know a few parents who have gone out of State to have a breast removal done for their 16 or 17 year olds who had severely large breasts that were causing physical as well as emotional problems. Breast removal is considered reversible, but no one I know has ever wanted it reversed.

None of the social or medical decisions about my child's care, or the children of my friends' care, were made quickly or easily. Medical transgender transitioning takes years, with multiple decisions being made along the way with the guidance of several medical professionals, following the WPATH guidelines. It's always done with parental/guardian consent. Everyone is evaluating the child at every step, looking for a persistent, consistent gender identity, usually over the course of years. This is not care given on a whim, or as an "experiment". Google the WPATH Guidelines and you'll find best practices guidelines based on widely accepted, peer reviewed studies, including longitudinal studies. Compare for yourself these studies' findings versus the "statistics" that have been cited in support of this bill. Go to The Trevor Project to see the latest studies on suicide rates in the transgender youth community. Transgender youth are less likely to commit suicide when they are supported within their communities. We are a small percentage of the population, and we need your help preserving our rights to fight for our kids lives. HB68 is an overreach into Parental Rights, and it will remove our ability to make the difficult decisions we need to make, with the guidance of medical professionals, trying to keep our kids alive and maybe even thriving.

Thank you!
Gwen Jones