



Opponent Testimony for House Bill 68

House Public Health Policy Committee

Cynthia Peeples, Founding Director, Honesty for Ohio Education

June 13, 2023

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 68. My name is Cynthia Peeples, my pronouns are she/her, and I am the founding director of Honesty for Ohio Education.

[Honesty for Ohio Education](#) is a nonpartisan, statewide coalition representing more than [50](#) organizational partners advocating for every student's right to receive an honest, high-quality education grounded in truth, facts, and diverse perspectives, regardless of race, identity, income, or zip code. We believe that education must reflect and affirm all identities, cultures, and lived experiences to maximize student engagement and achievement. And we wholly believe that students benefit most when caring families, skilled educators, and medical experts work together to create safe, inclusive, affirming learning environments steeped in evidence-based pedagogy and [Ohio's Whole Child framework](#). These intentional, nurturing learning spaces help students develop into healthy, thriving adults. Important [brain science](#) tells us that a student's safety and levels of toxic stress have a direct impact on their cognitive function, ability to master content, and their own self-worth.

This is why we oppose House Bill 68 and similar legislation that intentionally targets and endangers LGBTQ+ youth, families, and communities. Despite research, data, and the professional recommendations of medical, legal, and education experts, HB 68 seeks to ban and restrict life-saving

gender-affirming care for Ohio youth. Shockingly, this so-called public health bill stands in stark contrast to the medical expertise and best practices of the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Counseling Association, the American Osteopathic Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the US Department of Health and Human Services, and many other leading governmental and nongovernmental health organizations.

More important, it dismisses the lived experiences and realities of LGBTQ+ Ohioans. **Gender-affirming care saves lives.** While this political and ideological assault on the LGBTQ+ community may feel politically lucrative to some proponents, this legislation will endanger the lives and well-being of countless Ohio children across the state. FULL STOP. Despite rampant misinformation and extremist narratives, this care does not force youth to undergo medical transition. Gender-affirming care is a highly individualized journey that helps individuals define, explore, and actualize their gender identity, without judgments or assumptions. It focuses on individual needs by including age and developmental-appropriate psychoeducation, parental and family support, social interventions, and gender-affirming medical interventions. It is a vital medical lifeline that does not care about political battlegrounds, party affiliations, interpretations of scripture, demonic possession, or narrow worldviews. It is concerned with providing quality of life and ensuring youth and adults can live an authentic life with clarity, dignity, and respect.

In 2022, the [Trevor Project](#) reported nearly 1 in 5 transgender and nonbinary youth attempted suicide, with LGBTQ+ youth of color reporting higher rates than their white peers. Adding to this avoidable tragedy, fewer than 1 in 3 transgender and nonbinary youth lived in safe, affirming homes. In contrast, data shows that suicide rates significantly declined and mental health improved when LGBTQ+ youth received a form of gender-affirming care, felt affirmed in their schools, and lived in safe communities. **To be clear, LGBTQ+ youth are not struggling with their mental health or prone to suicide because of who they are, but rather because of how they are treated for who they are.**

In a school setting, gender-affirming care resources and information are invaluable tools for students and families grappling with complicated issues of gender identity and family dynamics. Ohio

educators and staff work closely with students to have a safe, healthy dialogue with their families around these important, complex issues. The [Ohio School Counselor Association](#) and social workers follow a national set of ethical standards explicitly instructing them to prioritize the importance of family when working with any student.

Thousands of students, families, educators, medical professionals, legislators, and your constituents oppose House Bill 68 and other politically-motivated anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Each of you was elected to serve all Ohioans, regardless of our pronouns, gender identity, or who we love, absent of your religious, ideological, and political agendas.

We urge you to vote NO on Ohio House Bill 68 and prioritize the lives and safety of all Ohio children.

Thank you.