



December 10, 2023

Dear Chairman Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Amanda Kostura. I am a Licensed Independent Social Worker Supervisor, and Founder & President of Carve Your Own Path. Our organization provides crucial and necessary mental health counseling services and supports for marginalized and oppressed individuals in Ohio. I am strongly opposed of House Bill 8, the “Parents Bill of Rights”.

This bill would require clinical professionals, including social workers like me, to go against our Code of Ethics regarding a client’s right to privacy. Our governing bodies including the Ohio Revised Code, the Ohio Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage & Family Therapist Board, and National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics have standards and guidelines in place to ensure we are providing the most current and evidence-based care for youth.

LGBTQIA+ youth are already ostracized, disenfranchised, discriminated against, and harmed physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and more by their own families, communities, housing providers, healthcare providers, and their own government who is meant to represent them. We know through peer reviewed research and evidence based-approaches that providing access to affirming and inclusive mental health care is crucial to not only improving the quality of life for transgender and nonbinary individuals, but LIFE-SAVING. Transgender people experience higher rates of suicide attempts. According to The Trevor Project’s 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, 54% of young people who identified as transgender or nonbinary reported having seriously considered suicide in the last year, and 29% have attempted to end their lives.

Our clients regularly inform us how scared they are for their safety, especially with pending legislation to remove their access to healthcare and other basic human rights. Confidentiality is one of our highest ethical principles, and is what allows youth to explore their feelings, experiences, and identities safely, without fear of reprimand or worse from their families. Should this bill pass, we will see a decline in youth seeking out mental health support for fear of being outed and potentially harmed by their families. This will only worsen rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidality in this already vulnerable population of children.

Youth safety in exploring their own mental health is not an issue up for debate amongst legislators. We insist that the government allow the educated, trained, and licensed providers who are doing this work day in and out, along with the current evidence-based and peer-reviewed research, determine how we address the needs of the youth mental health in our communities.

I ask that you take my testimony into consideration and urge you to vote against this life-threatening bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amanda Kostura', written in a cursive style.

Amanda Kostura, LISW-S
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