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Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Savannah Carlstrom Page, I use she/they pronouns, and I am a Licensed Independent Social Worker in the state of Ohio. I started my career in school-based mental health services, and currently serve as the Director of Behavioral Health & Clinical Services at Kaleidoscope Youth Center. **I am here today in strong opposition to House Bill 8, which is redundant at best, and dangerous at worst.**

Should this bill pass, I am unaware of any meaningful new rights that will be established for parents or guardians; they will continue to be able to utilize parental review boards to examine instructional material, to request that their student be exempt from certain lessons, to consent or withhold consent for certain services, and to communicate with their young person's service providers, as is already the case. **If passed, what this bill will accomplish is further marginalization and fear among our queer and trans young people, as well as further pressure being placed on our already over-taxed mental healthcare providers.** As a social worker, I am here standing on the side of safe, appropriate, and confidential care for all young people, including our queer and trans youth, in collaboration with the adults in their lives. Rigid control should not be mistaken for appropriate collaboration.

As a social worker and mental health clinician in Ohio public schools, navigating appropriate and ethical disclosures to parents, guardians, and families was a regular part of my everyday work. Usually, one of the first steps to working with a new client was to obtain consent from a parent or guardian, and talk with that adult about their concerns and goals for their child. Occasionally, an adolescent client would exercise their right to consent for their own services in the short-term, which usually meant that I had four appointments with them, meeting once a week, to get to understand their needs, their concerns about talking to their families about what was going on in their lives, and to make a plan for talking with those family members so that services could continue and lines of communication could begin to open up. Sometimes, the young person felt trepidation about going to their families because they felt unprepared to come out to them about their sexuality or gender identity; often their concerns had much more to do with other family dynamics or simply feeling fearful of their mental health needs being burdensome to family members. In these scenarios, our time together always focused on supporting the young person in creating a plan for safer disclosure and developing coping skills for managing their anxiety and any other anticipated emotional impacts that could come from their family's response. In many cases, I was able to witness huge relief from young people when they were able to feel supported in talking to their families about these challenging issues at their own pace and were met with love and

acceptance. In some cases, I unfortunately saw young people's fears of rejection and invalidation be confirmed, and I felt defeated when families declined to consent for further services, removing the young person's connection to an affirming adult. In either of these cases, **the removal of my professional role as a provider to spend time listening to and supporting my client, and helping them to prepare for those difficult conversations, would have made my job exponentially more difficult and the likelihood of young clients receiving any benefit from my services much smaller.** In the latter case, it's entirely possible that had I been required to also disclose the client's queer or trans identity, that I may also have risked the young person being subject to new neglect or abuse by their family, while simultaneously disconnecting them from me as their provider, perhaps one of very few affirming adults in the young person's life, and certainly a mandated reporter who may have been able to notice and report the signs of that harm.

Of course, collaboration with parents was not my only responsibility as a school-based clinician; I also had a legal and ethical obligation to protect my clients' rights to privacy and confidentiality. The NASW Code of Ethics states that social workers "should respect clients' right to privacy," "may disclose confidential information when appropriate with valid consent from a client," and "should protect confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of professional service." **It is never the goal of a mental health provider to keep critical information from parents/guardians, and we are already required to report any risks to a young person's safety.** This bill's ill-defined requirement to report "any changes to a student's services related to mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being" strips providers of our ability to use clinical judgment, best practice standards, and professional ethical guidelines when working with youth and their families.

The ethical principles of social work also state, "social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person" and "respect and promote the right of clients to self-determination." **This bill focuses on parental "rights," or perhaps more aptly, parental control, while attempting to erase the fact that queer and trans youth are also people with rights that are being stripped away.** As students in schools, as clients receiving healthcare services, as members of this community, they are inherently worthy people, deserving of the same rights to self-determination, privacy, and confidentiality as everyone else in Ohio. Throughout the development and discussion of this bill, it has become increasingly apparent that their personhood is neither seen nor respected by this legislative body. This bill's distinct lack of protections against disclosure to parents that may result in abuse, abandonment, or neglect makes this abundantly clear; this bill's proponents appear more interested in protecting a parent's "right" to control and even harm their child than in protecting youth. I urge you to join me in opposing House Bill 8, and protecting the rights of all of our young people.

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