

Written Opposition Testimony HB 8
Senate Education Committee

Chair Brennen, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony today. My name is Elizabeth Rieger. I am a licensed independent social worker. I have 42 years of experience working directly with people in this field. Twelve of my 42 years of experience was working as a school social worker, certified by the Ohio Department of Education. Currently, and for the last 11 years, I have been a private practice clinician, working with children and adults. I am strongly opposed to HB 8.

Among all the tasks children are called upon to develop when they enter school, developing autonomy may be one of the most important. Children reaching adolescence are in a critical time for development of autonomy as they get closer to adulthood. Erik Erikson developed the psycho-social stages of development theory, which has helped parents, education personnel, and the mental health community understand developmental tasks through the lifespan.¹ Stage 5 of Erikson's theory is titled "identity vs. role confusion" and occurs between the ages of 12-18. Saul McLeod, PhD, researcher, suggests in an article titled "Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychological Development", that adolescents given the freedom to explore their identity, are likely to have a strong sense of independence, while those adolescents who are restricted from exploring their identity may struggle to identify their purpose or path.² In order to grow into healthy adults, children in grades Kindergarten through high school benefit from appropriate opportunities to explore and develop their own identities, and the freedom to figure out their identity.

School social workers are uniquely qualified and well trained to assist students in exploring their identity. School social workers can provide gender diverse students with a safe space to process their feelings and experiences. School social workers can help students develop skills to navigate difficult discussions with their parents regarding any subjects. But, as it pertains to transgender and gender diverse students coming out to parents, school social workers can provide clinical interventions geared to aide both student and parent in that process. If HB 8 passes, however, school social workers will no longer be seen by students as a safe person, nor will school social work offices be seen as safe spaces by the student body, leaving transgender and gender diverse youth vulnerable and without a safe adult in their lives. This bill will fundamentally change school social workers ability to offer best practice, evidenced-based treatment within the school setting.

¹Psychology Today (January 31, 2019) Retrieved October 9, 2023 from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/lifespan-perspectives/201901/erikson-s-gift-the-developmental-tasks-adulthood>

²Simply Psychology (August 2, 2023) Retrieved October 9, 2023 <https://www.simplypsychology.org/erik-erikson.html>

Federal law protects members of the LGBTQ+ community from discrimination after the Supreme Court ruling in 2020. According to the LGBTQ+ Bill of Rights, students have the right to decide when, and how to come out.³ HB 8 not only violates students privacy rights, it can open the student to hostility, rejection, and even violence in unsafe homes when outed prior to being ready.

As a therapist, I talk with children and their parents about my Informed Consent. We discuss at length the possibility of a child being able to talk openly about things in their life that do not want to share with parents. In all my years of clinical work experience, I have only had one parent who decided not to sign the consent, and, by contrast, almost every parent said, enthusiastically, they would sign the consent. Most parents have told me that they wanted their child to be able to build a trusting relationship with their therapist, in hopes that it will improve the way their child is feeling about themselves, as well as improve the parent/child relationship. My Informed Consent is absolutely clear that if a child is feeling suicidal, parents will be notified. HB 8 will destroy the trust that children build in their school social workers. That lack of trust, could lead to anxiety, isolation, and decreased sense of worth.

As a social worker with 42 plus years of experience, and 23 years of clinical work with children, and due to the risk associated with outing LGBTQ+ students, should HB 8 pass, I ask each of the members of the Senate Education Committee to vote no on HB 8.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions. You can reach me by phone at 937-203-8141 or via email at liz@lizrieger.com

³ACLU (June 15, 2020) Retrieved October 9, 2023

<https://www.glsen.org/activity/lgbtq-student-rights>