

## McLaren Opponent Testimony to HB 8

To Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, my name is Melissa McLaren, I am the mother of two 18 year olds who just graduated from an Ohio high school, and I am urging you to vote no on House Bill 8.

As the parent of a child who identifies as LGBTQ, I have always considered the faculty, administrators, and staff of our local schools to be partners in the health and safety of my child. My child knows that certain members of the school staff are safe adults to reach out to when needed. There have been several instances when my child has told me after the fact that they visited the school nurse or the school counselor. At minimum, annual conversations were had with the school staff regarding the mental health and well-being of my child. I trust them to care for her needs during the school day and to reach out to me appropriately when necessary. I also know that I must allow them to do their jobs to create a safe environment for my child. Our partnership in her care has been seamless and collaborative. I hope that is the goal for all families working with the school staff.

The concerns I have regarding HB 8 is that it disrupts a child's right to safety, well-being, and reasonable education through vague language regarding "sexually explicit content." Without clear and standardized language regarding what is considered "sexually explicit content" then everything from passages in the Bible (most of the book of Song of Solomon, many stories about King David and his wives, the treatment of Lot's daughters) to biology textbooks and works of art could fall under this terminology. Our children already have access to sexually explicit content on the internet. Our schools can put their head in the sand and ignore the issue, or we can ensure that they are hearing accurate and relevant information in a safe environment.

This language would also impact medically accurate sex information. I am a nurse and have always used appropriate terminology with my children regarding body parts, sexual education, consent, and body autonomy, but I know many adults who either don't know this information or don't share it with their children, relying on the schools to educate them on these matters. I would hope that the schools have at least clearly identified competencies that each school must meet to help all our children with baseline knowledge in these areas. The vague language of "sexuality content" including "gender ideology" makes it very challenging for educators to know what is acceptable or unacceptable if this bill becomes law. We have seen the impacts of laws like this on teachers in Florida, where many have felt the need to flee the state or leave the teaching profession because of the heavy level of oversight by people who are not trained educators.

Regarding safety, this bill will put LGBTQ students at risk. The language of the bill requires school faculty and staff to share with parents about a child questioning their gender identify or sexual orientation without any exceptions for the child's safety. This can have horrible and unintended consequences from the intent of this bill. My children have friends that were forced to leave the home the moment they turned 18, despite still being in high school because of a strained relationship with parents. Others are suffering in households where who they are is used against them physically, emotionally, and financially. If the goal of this bill is to protect students, then the language of this bill must reflect the need to protect children from all situations where sharing certain information could lead to harm at home.

The name of this bill is the Ohio Unsafe Students act. However, by forcing school staff to "out" students before they are ready, and even if the staff feel it puts children at risk, then we are not keeping our

children safe at all. If the intention of the bill is to keep Ohio students safe, then isn't a forced outing regardless of risk of harm the exact opposite?

Please let our experts continue to do their job. Politicians, while well meaning, do not need to take on the role of experts in this area. Please do not pass HB 8 and usurp the expertise of our trained professionals or remove schools as safe spaces to learn accurate and relevant information.

Melissa McLaren