

To the Senators of the 135th General Assembly,

I write to you after the House passage of the most devastating and ill informed legislation targeting our vulnerable transgender youth. Our trans children have become political pawns in a system that increasingly covers its ears to their cries. I am a lifelong educator, a public school teacher, and the parent of non-binary adult children. The bills that have made their way to the Senate are horrific for the young people I serve and love.

HB8, which is cloaked and marketed with the name "Parents Bill of Rights," is just one bill in this misguided legislation. While I agree that parents should have a say in their child's education, and that open conversation between parent and educator is important, this bill has other provisions that endanger students. Just like students who are gay, Title IX protects transgender students. Consider this: If a student has not told their parents that they might be gay or transgender, why would that be? Could it be that they fear the reaction of the parent? Could it be unsafe for them? Could they just not be ready to tell them? "Coming out" is a very scary process for anyone, and young people moreso than many. Often a person will share this information with a trusted person outside their immediate family first. They will share with someone who they trust will accept them and who, if they are not accepted, may have a more limited role in their life. Coming out to family with the risk of rejection, violence, and possible homelessness is a far greater risk.

This is what would happen with HB8. Any student who trusted a teacher or other school staff member would be outed into a potentially unsafe environment. Yes, they are minors, but they are also people who deserve to be able to share their most personal selves when, where, and with whom they choose. My students have trusted me, my colleagues, and our school as they navigate these difficult waters. The safety and trust of our students would be shattered with the demands of this legislation.

My own child came out to us at age 21. We are a very open and accepting family, and their sibling had already come out. There was no evidence that we would reject them. NONE. And yet, they wrote a note and went for a walk after handing it to us, saying that they hoped we'd understand and accept them. If my child felt this way in a supportive environment, imagine a child in a nonsupportive environment! My heart was broken that they felt scared to tell us.

I encourage you to consider these thoughts as this bill comes to a vote in the Senate. A **NO** vote is necessary to protect the lives and health of our students. The rhetoric of the opposition would have you believe otherwise, but please listen to those who are actually living with these issues.

Sincerely,
Dawn Riggs
Logan, Ohio