

Senate Education Committee
Brenner@ohio.gov
Obrien@ohiosenate.gov
Ingram@ohiosenate.gov
Blessing@ohiosenate.gov
SHuffman@ohiosenate.gov
Reynolds@ohiosenate.gov
Sykes@ohiosenate.gov

December 12, 2023

RE: HB8 the unsafe student bill - oppositional testimony

Dear Chair Brenner:

This bill is unnecessary. This bill is unconstitutional. This bill is a prime example of extreme government overreach. It is an unwarranted burden on Ohio teachers and the education system. And I cannot overstate how much I oppose the language in HB8. I urge you to vote against it. It is crucial that any legislation in this realm is carefully crafted to ensure inclusivity, protect the well-being and privacy of all students, and foster an educational environment that encourages open dialogue, understanding, and growth.

My name is James, and I am a product of the Ohio education system. I attended public preschool and kindergarten. I attended a private, religious school for grade school—one of the best in Ohio. I returned to Ohio public schooling in high school. And I graduated from an Ohio public university, where I had both a double-major and double-minor.

While recognizing the importance of addressing various aspects of education and student well-being, I strongly believe this bill raises significant issues that warrant reconsideration.

Firstly, the definition of "biological sex" provided in the bill may inadvertently contribute to an exclusionary environment for transgender, intersex, and other gender non-conforming students. By narrowly defining "biological sex" without consideration for an individual's psychological, chosen, or subjective experience of gender, we risk overlooking the diverse and valid identities that exist within our student population. **Education should be inclusive, respectful, and affirming of the identities of all students.**

Furthermore, the definition of "sexuality" in the bill appears to be overly broad and could potentially stigmatize important discussions about sexual health and consent. Limiting the scope of sexuality education may hinder students from receiving comprehensive information necessary for their well-being. It is crucial that we provide accurate and age-appropriate sexual education to empower students to make informed decisions and foster a healthier understanding of relationships. I also have concerns that any mention of transgender people could be inappropriately categorized as "sexually inappropriate."

The provisions related to a student's mental, emotional, or physical health and parental involvement raise the most concerns. While acknowledging the importance of parental rights, it is essential to strike a balance that ensures students have access to necessary healthcare and social services without jeopardizing their privacy or emotional or physical well-being. The bill's requirement to notify parents about a student's request to identify as a gender different from their biological sex may potentially expose vulnerable students to unwarranted challenges and conflicts within their families... which may even lead to violence.

The creation of policies related to "sexuality" content and a student's well-being, while *perhaps* well-intentioned, will lead to a chilling effect on educators. Teachers may be hesitant to provide comprehensive and inclusive education, fearing repercussions or misinterpretation of the bill's provisions. This could hinder the development of a safe and supportive learning environment, ultimately impacting the academic and personal growth of our students. Teachers may also spend so much time monitoring their students for subtle changes in their appearance or demeanor to determine what to phone home over that they waste valuable learning time, to the detriment of the entire class.

Additionally, the requirement for parents to be notified in advance of any material containing "sexuality" content and the ability to excuse students from such instruction may impede the educational experience for those students who would benefit from a comprehensive and inclusive curriculum. This provision may also disproportionately impact students who come from families where such discussions are not encouraged or supported.

In conclusion, while recognizing the importance of parental involvement and creating a positive learning environment, it's important to realize that this bill does not do that. I urge you to please **vote no** or at least take a reasonable reconsideration of the language and provisions.

Respectfully,

James C. Knapp, Esq.
Cleveland, Ohio