

12/11/2023

State Senator Andrew O. Brenner
Senate Building
1 Capitol Square
1st Floor
140
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Regarding House Bill 8:

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

Thank you for reviewing our testimony **in opposition** to HB 8.

My name is Carson Hartlage, and I am writing to you as a concerned citizen, a medical student, and a native Ohioan who is also proudly transgender. I am writing this letter with a fellow Ohio-based medical student, Delia Sosa, who is also proudly transgender. We both work with Ohio's transgender community as medical students, volunteers, community members, and advocates.

We would like to highlight some statistics from the Trevor Project that are relevant to this bill. The [2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#) survey found that LGBTQ youth were more likely to identify school as an affirming space (55%) than home (37%). Youth without access to affirming home and school spaces or social support were more likely to attempt suicide. This bill would make Ohio schools less affirming for LGBTQ youth and may out youth to non-affirming and potentially unsafe homes.

Another report on [Homelessness and Housing Instability Among LGBTQ Youth](#) found that almost 1 in 3 LGBTQ youth experience homelessness or housing instability at some point, with 11% of these reporting that they were kicked out or abandoned due to their LGBTQ identity. Forcing schools to notify parents of children exploring gender identity and learning about LGBTQ topics could lead to more youth being kicked out of their homes. This is especially dangerous in an already [overloaded](#) foster care and child welfare system in Ohio.

This bill has also served as a reminder of our own lived experiences as queer and transgender people who were once in the shoes of today's transgender youth.

Delia: On Valentine's Day in 2011, my middle school classmates, including some of my supposed friends, outed me to my entire class and several teachers. The environment at my middle school and in my broader community was not supportive of LGBTQIA+ people, at times even hostile towards us. As much as I wanted to be myself, I was living

in an environment where it was safest to keep my identity hidden. I had come out to my mom, but she wasn't convinced I was actually part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Had my teachers or school administrators been forced to share my identity outside the walls of the school, I would have been targeted by our religious leaders, other community members, and potentially my extended family. Coming out is the best option for some people, but it is not the best option for everyone. House Bill 8 will foster unsafe environments for LGBTQIA+ youth who are not ready to come out, like me.

Carson: I was a queer and trans kid in Ohio. While I did not attend public schools as are covered in this bill, I did attend schools that were not LGBTQ-affirming and grew up in a home that was usually hostile toward the LGBTQ community. My school curricula did not include any sexuality content, other than abstinence and Catholic family planning. I did not know any out-and-proud LGBTQ teachers or school administrators and only a couple of LGBTQ students. However, this did not change the fact that I was LGBTQ. Rather than having access to information about LGBTQ issues or an affirming school or home environment, I spent the majority of my childhood ashamed, alone, and hiding who I was. I do not want today's LGBTQ youth in Ohio to feel the same.

House Bill 8 will forcibly out LGBTQIA+ youth who may consider school their safe haven in an otherwise hostile environment. The ability to determine where they are safe existing as themselves will be taken away from them, and school staff who are doing their best to keep these young people safe.

Therefore, We call upon all members of the Committee to **oppose** House Bill 8. Please do not allow this harmful bill to pass onto the Senate floor.

Thank you for your consideration,

Carson Hartlage (they/them & he/him), MD/PhD Student
Delia Sosa (they/them), MD Student