

**Opponent Testimony for House Bill 8**  
**Nicolas Shannon Savard, PhD**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
**December 11, 2023**

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

Thank you for accepting this testimony. I write to express my opposition to House Bill 8. My name is Dr. Nicolas Shannon Savard. I am a resident of Columbus, Franklin County. As an educator in the state of Ohio, as a member of the LGBTQ community, and as a transgender adult who works with trans and gender nonconforming youth, I have significant concerns about the notification requirements specifically surrounding gender identity and biological sex.

My main concern is that the bill's exclusive focus on parental control without regard to the potential impact on students. While I agree that parents absolutely need to be informed if their child is experiencing significant distress, a medical problem, bullying, or is engaging in behavior that puts their own or others' wellbeing at risk, a student's disclosure of "a gender that does not align with the student's biological sex" doesn't meet that standard. A student's request that school staff use a new name or pronouns does not indicate there is anything "wrong." It wouldn't require that a parent take action outside of school. Requiring parental notification in such an instance does, however, send a message to the student that school staff believe that questioning one's gender or being transgender is in and of itself a problem.

Further, requiring school personnel to essentially "out" gender nonconforming students carries major risks that directly undermine the bill's goal of maintaining open communication about students' mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing. For students who perceive their home to be supportive of their identity, their parents more than likely already know about their child's gender identity, making notification unnecessary (and likely very repetitive, given that middle and high school students typically have 10 or more teachers each school year). To disclose a student's LGBTQ identity to *anyone* else (parents, other school personnel) without their permission is to deny them the agency to make their own decisions regarding their own coming out process. For members of the LGBTQ community, regardless of age, disclosing someone else's sexual orientation or gender identity without their explicit consent is a major breach of trust. Rather than maintaining lines of communication, HB-8 is far more likely to cause students to view the adults in their school as untrustworthy. HB-8's notification requirements for details of students' lives that are not a cause for concern puts teachers in the position of "informant" rather than a trusted adult who can provide guidance and support. I fear that HB-8 will actively undermine educators' ability to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for their students.

For LGBTQ students in particular, perceiving school staff as supportive has a significant impact on their educational persistence and mental health. In their 2019 "National School Climate Survey," GLSEN (Gay Lesbian Straight Educator's Network) found that 84% of transgender students felt unsafe at school. Over half of those students (46% of all transgender students) reported having missed days of school because of those safety concerns.<sup>1</sup> Since GLSEN began their research on school climate in 1997, they have found four key elements that increase perceived and actual safety, sense of belonging, overall mental health, attendance, and GPA for LGBTQ students:

1. Anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation and gender identity. HB-8, in its specific targeting of transgender and gender non-conforming students is inherently discriminatory.
2. Supportive school personnel. HB-8, as mentioned above, directly undermines school staff members' efforts to be supportive, trusted adults to LGBTQ students.
3. the presence of a Gay-Straight Alliance or other LGBTQ student organization.
4. positive representation of LGBTQ people in the curriculum. HB-8's reporting requirements will make including age appropriate, academically relevant LGBTQ representation challenging and time consuming for teachers, as it would fall under "sexuality content and gender ideology."

If the Senate Education Committee is committed to the wellbeing and educational outcomes of all students in this state, that commitment must include LGBTQ students. I urge the Committee to recognize the difference between policies and practices that extensive research shows improve educational outcomes as well as school safety versus partisan culture war issues dressed up as "parental rights." Please strongly consider my testimony in support of students, educators, and parents in the state of Ohio. I urge you to vote NO on this bill.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to provide testimony. I would be happy to answer any additional questions or provide input as needed. You may reach me by email at [nicolas@drnssavard.com](mailto:nicolas@drnssavard.com).

Respectfully submitted,

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<sup>1</sup> Kosciw, Joseph G., et al. *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools. A Report from GLSEN*. Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). 121 West 27th Street Suite 804, New York, NY 10001, 2020. <https://www.glsen.org/research/2019-national-school-climate-survey>