



Belonging Begins Here.

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Chair Brenner and members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity today to testify in opposition to House Bill 8. My name is Amanda Erickson, my pronouns are she her and hers, and I serve as the Director of Education and Outreach at Kaleidoscope Youth Center, Ohio's largest and longest-standing organization dedicated to supporting LGBTQIA+ youth. Since 1994, KYC has provided a safe space for youth to exist as their authentic selves without fear, provided resources to teachers and other youth-serving professionals, and advocated for youth within their schools.

I went to school to be a teacher. I earned my Bachelor of Science in Education from Bowling Green State University right here in Ohio at a time when the program was booming and graduates were leaving the state in droves, heading to places like North Carolina and Arizona where we heard there were enough openings they would practically be guaranteed a job.

A few years later, [according to data from the Center for American Progress](#), Ohio had a 50% decline in student enrollment in teacher preparation programs. Now, over the past few years, we have been hearing about teacher shortages. Not enough teachers to go around for the jobs we have. There has been a lot of debate about why this is happening, and there seem to be many different answers all snowballing with a global pandemic to create a major problem for our schools.

After I graduated, my career took a different path, and I have spent the past decade in the nonprofit sector here in Columbus. People often ask me if I would ever return to the classroom, if I would change my career trajectory back to what I had intended in my early twenties. But I do not envy my friends who did become classroom teachers, and do not have interest in reentering the field. Why would I?

Why would I want to be a teacher in Ohio when my legislators are so obsessed with gender and sexuality that they do not have time to pass legislation that would actually improve our schools?

Why would I want to be a teacher in Ohio when my legislators are proposing laws that would ban me from putting a family picture on my desk, or from talking about my family at all? Since this bill does not define "sexual concepts" "or "gender ideology," there are those who would argue that my wedding photo or the questions it could prompt would qualify as one or the other.

Why would I want to be a teacher in Ohio when my legislators are giving parents a green light to complain about my teaching, when I am the one who went to school to be a teacher?



Why would I want to go against my personal ethics to out a child without their permission, and for my social worker friends to go against their professional ethics and risk their licensure by being asked to do the same?

In elementary civics education we learn that we have responsibilities to protect our own and each other's rights. We cannot have rights without responsibilities. Parents have a responsibility to create an affirming home environment that communicates unconditional love and fundamental safety to their children, including their gay children, their transgender children, their nonbinary children, their questioning children. Young people need to know that home is safe, and only then can parents expect a heart to heart conversation about their child's identity. This is not the teacher's conversation to have, it's not the counselor's, it's not the administrator's. It is up to the parent to cultivate the safety, and the young person to work up the courage.

[Teachers have a responsibility](#) to protect their students from conditions harmful to learning, or to their health and safety. Public school systems have a legal responsibility to protect LGBTQIA+ students from discrimination [according to Title IX](#).

Kaleidoscope Youth Center is here to support you, Ohio's schools, and parents of LGBTQ+ youth wherever they are on their journeys to acceptance, as we continue to tackle these sensitive issues. Research shows that teachers and other school staff are more likely to feel comfortable stepping in to support students when they have learned how to do so, and I would be willing to bet the same would hold true for parents.

We must learn to trust teachers and administrators to do their jobs, trust young people when they share their experiences, and trust parents to build relationships with their children that foster open dialogue and a sense of safety. Together, we can create a community where young people feel empowered to come out at the time they choose to the people they trust, and where teachers feel empowered to use their professional expertise to support their students and build even stronger communities.

In solidarity,



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