

HB 8 Opposition Testimony - Cam Ogden

Chair Brenner and Ranking Member Ingram. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak in opposition to HB 8.

After more than 200 people showed up last week begging for the state to respect their rights as parents, it appears their outrage was misheard. The LGBT community finds itself targeted by legislation that purports to advance parents' rights but will, in actuality, erode them.

Like many queer people, I was not supported by my parents growing up. I came out to them as transgender at 15, and I was met with denial. Although I now have a strong relationship with my mother and father, my time in high school was a difficult period in our lives. In the home, I was not referred to by my preferred pronouns, and it wasn't encouraged that I use those pronouns at school either. They elected to take me to non-affirming psychiatrists and therapists. All in the hope of preventing me from being transgender.

My parents were able to prevent me from transitioning and being affirmed in my gender identity. It was their decision, and they now deeply regret not supporting me through my youth. We are lucky that I'm still here to forgive them.

I went to a school that included LGBT topics in its curriculum and had students who were part of the LGBT community. The policies toward transgender students were not perfect, but the curriculum, projects, and classroom discussions were very diverse. My queer classmates who were supported by their parents were able to fully engage the curriculum with their unique personal experiences. We learned how LGBT identities and gender intersected with and influenced the course of history, particularly within the context of studying historical figures in civil rights movements. Teachers did not need to constantly check if a student's presentation about **both** of their mothers violated the vague terminology of HB 8. As a result of this accepting and intellectually open environment, I felt safer in school and was able to focus on my academics.

When teachers made passing mentions of the role of gender and sexuality in the lives and legacies of historical icons, my parents didn't run to the statehouse and beg the government to parent me on their behalf. They didn't ask for the "right" to complain about inclusive books and curriculum or to pull me out of class at the slightest whiff of queer history. They didn't do any of that, because they recognized that not all parents felt the same way. They knew history was full of diverse people, and my parents wanted me to learn about all of it. Not just the parts they agreed with.

This bill hurts **all** families who want their children to receive a diverse education, but it especially targets those who are part of the LGBT community or supportive parents of queer youth. It provides an avenue for parents with anti-LGBT views to assert those values on the children of other parents who disagree. Rather than benefitting parents' rights across the board, HB 8

creates a system whereby anti-LGBT views and uninclusive curriculum standards will be preferred.

Despite the name given to HB 8, the question before this committee today is not whether they support parents' rights. It is whether this legislature supports the rights of **all** parents. Not just those whose families and children follow a specific lifestyle.

For the sake of these kids' schooling, and parents across the state who want to give their kids the best possible educational experience: Please vote no on HB 8.