

Senate Education Committee: House Bill 8

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Private Citizen

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee.:

I am a gay licensed social worker currently living in Columbus, but from rural Perry County. I currently work with adult LGBTQ folks, but hope to eventually work with queer youth later in my life. I knew I was a lesbian when I was 15, but did not come out to anyone until I was 17. I graduated with around 100 kids from my public school, in my school, no one was out. I had no guidance, honestly I did not know a single other gay person. No other kids, no adults, and nothing was being talked about, not in our health classes (that wasn't a real health class) and certainly not in our sex education course: which, was only a week long and strictly talked about abstinence, we were not even shown how to put on a condom. For information, I looked online for help, tips, advice, and validation for the things that I was experiencing. Which, if you know anything about the internet, was not the best nor safest option. I also did not know about any mental health resources provided by our school, but that's a completely different problem.

I did not know my parent's stance on LGBTQ folks. I used the two years to gauge what I thought their reaction would be, until finally I told them. I felt safe doing this, I had control while doing this. This is the control that the government would be taking away from these kids if this bill is passed. The kids know their safety level in their home. The kids know if they would be in danger. You do not, the education system does not, the school staff does not.

Being LGBTQIA+ has been criminalized in the past, and frankly in the present as well, it's been pushed as evil, sinful, unnatural, not normal. Imagine being 14, 15, 16 even younger, and realizing that something about you, people hate. People don't think you should have basic human rights; frankly they don't think you should be alive. Now, imagine, you talk to someone trusted at school about the agonizing worry you have been facing. The grief of the life you thought you had, the fear of the people around you if they found out, the uncertainty of if they found out: and then you find out that trusted adult tells your parents, tells your guardian, something you yourself have not fully accepted yet, and they take that control away from you. They take that safety, that control you have, and pull it right out from underneath you. Now you have to have that talk that every queer person has, but this time, it wasn't your choice. It could go good; it could go very horribly wrong. But it wasn't your choice. Imagine how you would feel, how your kids would feel, your grandkids.

Linked below are just a few resources I recommend to learn more about our community, especially our queer youth, the ones who are directly impacted by this bill. I highly recommend The Trevor Project for details with suicide, unhoused youth, and mental health in general, all of which will be included by this bill. I hope you look into these as well as other resources provided to you today and in the course of this hearing.

In conclusion, I am 23 years old, and I still have not come out to folks I love and care for. That being said, you want to out children to their guardians, with no care or concern about their safety, that's all this bill is, a way to regulate and a way to control. Why would the government, a body meant to protect folks, pass this bill which will most certainly, harm those it pretends to care about? I know, I would rather lose my licenses, something I have been working on for almost 5 years and is my livelihood, than out a child before they are ready, and certainly before they give consent.

Thank you for allowing me to speak, and on behalf of Ohio LGBTQIA+ community, we hope you vote no on House Bill 8.

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Trevor-Project-Homelessness-Report.pdf>

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/>