



**Opponent Testimony for House Bill 8
Senate Education Committee**

Cynthia Peeples, Founding Director, Honesty for Ohio Education

December 11, 2023

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 8. My name is Cynthia Peeples, my pronouns are she/her, and I am the founding director of Honesty for Ohio Education.

[Honesty for Ohio Education](#) is a nonpartisan, statewide coalition representing more than [60](#) organizational partners advocating for every student's right to receive an honest, high-quality education grounded in truth, facts, and diverse perspectives, regardless of their race, identity, income, or zip code. We believe that students benefit most when caring families, skilled educators, and behavioral health experts work together to create safe, inclusive, affirming learning environments steeped in evidence-based pedagogy and [Ohio's Whole Child framework](#). Important [brain chemistry science](#) tells us that a student's safety and levels of toxic stress have a direct impact on their cognitive function, ability to learn and master content, and self-worth.

This is why we oppose House Bill 8, and similar anti-LGBTQ+ legislation that endangers students by intentionally creating unsafe, hostile learning environments. Better known as the Unsafe Students Act, House Bill 8 forces "Don't Say Gay" censorship into Ohio classrooms by requiring teachers to notify parents about any "sexuality" content used in the classroom and provide alternative material if requested. This overt attempt to censor material around LGBTQ+ identities, family dynamics, relationships, and body autonomy proliferates fear and hate of the LGBTQ+ community, invites targeted harassment and intimidation of public school teachers, and unnecessarily burdens educators with administrative busy work.

Also harmful is the bill's definition of "biological sex", which undermines federal Title IX protections for LGBTQ+ students and staff. It also stands in stark contrast to the landmark US Supreme Court decision in [Bostock v. Clayton County](#) when it ruled that the prohibition on discrimination on the basis of sex under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 applies to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and

Honesty for Ohio Education

HonestyforOhioEducation.org • info@honestyforohioeducation.org • [@HonestyforOhioEd](https://twitter.com/HonestyforOhioEd)

gender identity. Codifying HB 8's definition of "biological sex" removes the rights of gay and transgender Americans by eroding existing protections for LGBTQ+ people in schools, at work, at home, and in public accommodations.

Lastly, HB 8 forces school districts to out transgender, gender nonconforming, and nonbinary students to their families, regardless of the risk or danger posed to the child. Not only does this bill dismiss devastating [rates](#) of abuse, violence, and suicide suffered by LGBTQ+ youth in their own [homes](#), it rejects the professional recommendations and protocol of trained medical, legal, and education experts around these complicated issues.

To be clear, LGBTQ+ youth are not struggling with their mental health or prone to suicide because of who they are, but because of how society stigmatizes them. In 2022, the [Trevor Project](#) reported nearly 1 in 5 transgender and nonbinary youth attempted suicide, with LGBTQ+ youth of color reporting higher rates than their white peers. Fewer than 1 in 3 transgender and nonbinary youth lived in safe, affirming homes.

Schools have been a lifeline for countless students living in fear or suffering abuse at home. The Trevor Project data also shows that suicide rates significantly decreased when LGBTQ+ students felt affirmed in their schools and lived in safe communities.

It is important to note that while Ohio educators and staff prioritize the safety and well-being of LGBTQ+ students, they first seek safe and healthy dialogue between a student and their family around issues of gender identity and sexuality. The Ohio School Counselor Association follows a [national set of ethical standards](#) explicitly instructing school counselors to prioritize the importance of family when working with any student. National standards state "school counselors recognize their primary ethical obligation for confidentiality is to the students but balance that obligation with an understanding of parents'/guardians' legal and inherent rights to be the guiding voice in their children's lives." The Unsafe Students Act ignores this professional best practice and many like it, which help to foster communication between students, families, and schools, and replaces these ethical standards with a dangerous, limited approach to all student interactions.

Thousands of students, families, educators, medical professionals, legislators, and your constituents oppose House Bill 8 and condemn politically-motivated anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Each of you was elected to serve all Ohioans, regardless of their pronouns, gender identity, or who they love.

We urge you to vote NO on Ohio House Bill 8 and prioritize the lives and safety of all Ohio children.

Thank you.

Honesty for Ohio Education

HonestyforOhioEducation.org • info@honestyforohioeducation.org • [@HonestyforOhioEd](https://twitter.com/HonestyforOhioEd)