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Ohio Senate Education Committee
1 Capitol Square Columbus, OH 43215

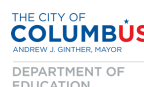
Chairman Brenner, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 8. My name is Mallory Golski, and I use she/her pronouns. I'm the civic engagement and advocacy manager for Kaleidoscope Youth Center, Ohio's largest and longest standing organization serving and supporting LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults, ages 12-24.

Much has been said and will continue to be said today by social workers and other professionals about why this bill is unnecessary at best and dangerous at worst. While the language in this bill has changed slightly throughout this process, as it stands right now, LGBTQIA+ youth fear that there is still considerable potential for queer and trans students to be harmed if this legislation were to pass. Here's what some KYC youth have said:

"I feel this is very targeted toward LGBT youth. From my understanding their claim is to protect youth from gayness or whatever. By outing children to their parents, it's putting them in direct danger. You don't know how that parent is going to react. I know a lot of trans and gay people who aren't out to their parents for various reasons. You have to respect their time and their boundaries. Putting them in a situation that could lead to abuse... I just can't understand why that would even cross peoples' minds." - **15-year-old KYC youth**

"Being a minor sucks in this country. You're basically legally not a full human because you don't have the rights that everyone else has and just because people had sex and made you doesn't mean that they can responsibly take care of you or that they should know everything about you." - **17-year-old KYC youth**

"This bill will almost certainly lead to abuse. Every single person in support of this bill is choosing harm by choosing to put children's safety in jeopardy in the name of 'parents' rights.' A parent's



job is to provide a safe environment for their kids. This will create situations that are the exact opposite of that. It's just not a good way to protect kids.” - 15-year-old KYC youth

“Coming out is a very personal process and that process can look very different for different people. Even as someone who is very safe as queer in my home, it took a long time for me to come out for various reasons and I would very much have hated it if that process had been interrupted. It's a sign of a lot of trust if they come out to someone at school so that is a huge violation of that child's trust if the government forces someone that the kid has confided in to break that boundary and tell parents, who may be putting the kid in emotional or even physical danger just because of something that they are.” - 16-year-old KYC youth

“If gay teachers talking about their families can be seen as ‘sexually explicit content,’ does that mean that straight teachers also have to take off their wedding rings? I know somebody who is queer and has talked to the social worker at our school about things that have happened because they are queer. They cannot come out because they think they could get kicked out from their parents. It's good for a kid to have someone to talk to if they're dealing with things who isn't just another kid. That's what social workers are for. That just defeats the purpose if they can just turn around to their parents and tell them and they get kicked out of their house because of it.” - 13-year-old KYC youth

“As someone who was almost outed to my parents by a teacher – I say almost because I already came out to my parents, just in case something like this happened – it really sucked, especially the way they talked about it. It felt like such a violation of my trust in them. They didn't know my home situation. They told my parents that your kid uses this name and these pronouns. It was awful. It didn't help anyone, and no matter if my parents were accepting or not, it only violates trust.” - 15-year-old KYC youth

“I don't want this bill to pass because my mom is already way too involved in my life and I don't have much privacy already and my mom already knows that I'm out but if that wasn't the case I'd be scared for my life. I'd just feel invaded, ya know?” - 17-year-old KYC youth

We agree that parents and families should have their young peoples' lives and best interests in mind – and, as such, major decisions around things like health care need to be made in conjunction with them – but the reality is that these decisions need to start first with the young person, who is the expert in their own life, identity and experience. So, if that young person feels like the safest person to come out to first is their teacher or guidance counselor or the school janitor – or to their peers in a conversation that happens to be overheard by any school personnel – it doesn't necessarily mean that they're *never* going to come out to their parents



and families, and it certainly doesn't mean that their teacher, counselor or janitor has the right to out the student on their behalf. It just means the young person is exercising their autonomy and privacy in choosing when they feel safe and comfortable to come out, as they have every right to do. But, here's the thing: even if it DOES mean that that young person will never come out to their parents or families, that's ALSO okay! All people, including young people, are entitled to their own privacy.

Now, as far as "sexuality content" portion of HB 8 goes: The truth is that K-12 students of all ages are generally not learning about what this bill considers "sexuality content" in school – heck, we can't even guarantee reliable, comprehensive *heterosexual* sex education in Ohio schools, let alone stories where two women happen to be holding hands or something. But, what I worry about is the chilling effect that the censorship aspects of this bill will have around what developmentally appropriate books that classrooms and libraries will end up keeping on the shelves for students to read on their own time.

When we censor certain stories from classrooms and libraries, we aren't just taking away the chance for some kids to see their lives and experiences reflected back at them – we're taking away crucial opportunities for those who don't share those same experiences to develop empathy and understanding for others.

Kaleidoscope Youth Center stands in firm opposition to House Bill 8. Young people are people who are entitled to their own privacy. Young people are people who should have the freedom to read stories that reflect their own lives and experiences. Let's focus on legislation that will create safer environments for them to feel comfortable enough to explore and share these parts of their lives – if and when they feel ready to.

Please vote no on House Bill 8. Thank you.

