

**Senate Education Committee  
Chairman Andrew Brenner  
Opposition Testimony for House Bill 8**

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Written Testimony  
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Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for receiving additional testimony on House Bill 8. At YWCA Columbus, we are concerned about the unintended consequences this bill might have on marginalized youth, especially those who are LGBTQ+. We provided testimony to this end on May 9, 2023, to the House Primary & Secondary Education Committee, and we would like to reiterate our opposition for the Senate.

YWCA Columbus has served the central Ohio region for over 100 years, and our mission of eliminating racism, empowering women, and bringing peace, justice, freedom, and dignity to all guides our long history supporting women and families in our community. In this mission, we locate our service to the youth of our community through empowering young girls in their authentic selves, including transgender girls and non-binary youth. We also center the autonomy and dignity of youth, who are the experts in their own stories and needs.

While the bill attempts to frame a responsible relationship among a school, a child, and their parents, the vague language of the bill might allow for the conflation of "sexually explicit material" to LGBTQ+ material or identities. Furthermore, the bill outlines that health-related issues must be reported out to parents, but this could look like potentially outing a child before they are ready to their family. For example, if a child socially transitions at school, but not at home due to concerns of abuse – or simply not being ready – then that may be a reportable issue. While the bill makes an exception for instances of potential abuse, abuse can happen behind closed doors or be otherwise difficult to ascertain until it happens.

We all deeply want to believe that a child's life is safe in the hands of their parents or guardians, but we know, especially in the case of LGBTQ+ youth, that is simply not always the case. Marginalized children, such as transgender youth, experience high rates of eviction from their family home. According to the Trevor Project, "28% of LGBTQ+ youth reported experiencing homelessness or housing instability at some point in their lives – and those who did had two to four times the odds of reporting depression, anxiety, self-harm, considering suicide, and attempting suicide compared to those with stable housing."<sup>1</sup> Those who do not face a threat as public as eviction might still face trauma and rifts within their families, which, without the proper social work intervention, could strain their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/>

Similarly, administration may be required to report relationships – even heterosexual ones – between teenagers to parents. This becomes a problem especially in strict religious or traditional households, regardless of which religion or which tradition, where a child may face serious consequences for something as simple and ordinary as having a “crush” on a classmate. What each individual family needs will differ based on their experiences, culture, and upbringing – the school’s responsibility is to remain steadfast in educating their child, and not in intervening on each and every personal choice a child makes.

Ultimately, we ask what the school’s role is in a child’s wellbeing. At a time when public schools are facing criticism for employing research-based, whole-child frameworks that aid in the best development of all children, inserting burdensome requirements that force teachers to police their students is not in the best interest of the child. Instead of cultivating a student-teacher relationship based in respect, understanding, and empathy, this bill would require the teacher to act as an untrustworthy authority with the power to potentially devastate a child’s home life. We ponder on if this bill is necessary for the protection of the family, or if it is an unnecessary bill that overburdens an already weakened public school system with more paperwork.

This bill may result in an undignified approach to a child’s autonomy in making decisions about their well-being, stripping them of the right to make decisions for their own school lives and publicly dictating their emotional desires in a way that could ultimately scar them for life. We encourage this committee to think of children as human beings with autonomy, whose decisions and choices should be respected and treated with dignity. We should trust our teachers to teach, and trust our parents to parent, and not legislate the relationship in a way that is burdensome to all parties involved.

We respectfully urge the Senate Education Committee to consider our testimony and vote no against HB8. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify against this legislation.

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