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Education Committee
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215
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RE: HB8 "Parents Bill of Rights" or the unsafe student bill - *oppositional testimony*

Dear Chair Brenner, Vice Chair, Ranking Member O'Brien, Sen. Ingram, and respected Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to address this important issue. I will be testifying today on behalf of TransOhio, but this issue is important to me on a personal level as well both as a parent and as a transgender person. If this bill was truly created to give more rights in public education to parents across the state, then why, why are my rights as a parent regarded as less than because I am transgender? Why should my gender invalidate my child's right to be represented in education the same as everyone else? My family is amazing, caring, and loving: we do not need to be hidden just because of who we are and who we love. Throughout education, students learn about families, about community, and they discuss their own families with each other. From Pre-K on, students learn about different family structures, middle school students make family trees, these are all integrated parts of the curriculum that LGBTQIA+ families exist in just by virtue of existing in schools as members of the community. So as a parent of an Ohio public school student, I say very clearly - trans people and LGBTQIA+ people belong in the curriculum.

TransOhio as an organization is familiar with the ongoing issues in Ohio public and private schools, including attempts to reduce or remove all educational and extracurricular content that is affiliated with LGBTQ+ identities, attempts to ban trans students from participating in team sports, attempts to restrict restroom usage, and refusals to refer to trans students by their names and the correct pronouns (even in English class, where students learn about the various articles of speech). This bill does not attempt to remedy any of those issues or to protect LGBTQ+ students from discrimination, harassment, or other harms. HB8 instead focuses on an alleged right of unsupportive parents to dictate what is taught to all students, over the objections of supportive parents, students, and teachers.

HB8 promotes dishonesty in education and fostering an unsafe learning environment for minority students across Ohio.

Ohio has seen a few “forced outing” bills over the past several years, and they have all failed. Previous bills have required schools to immediately notify parents if a student displays any signs of gender dysphoria or “demonstrates a desire to be treated in a manner opposite of the child’s biological sex.” This version defines sex as “biological sex,” which completely erases students with variations in sexual development—intersex students, as well as trans and nonbinary students. This bill requires a district to report “changes to a student’s mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being,” which sounds like a good thing... but it’s simply coded language for requiring districts to out LGBTQ+ students to their family. Under the language of this bill, this is required even if the school *knows* or has reason to believe that the student’s health, safety, and welfare will be put in jeopardy by this disclosure, because of a parent’s “political or religious” beliefs are held out to be superior than the student’s self-expression and overall wellbeing.

Schools must remain a safe, trusted space for students and educators, regardless of their race, gender identity, or sexual orientation. The overly vague standards in HB8 go against the Whole Child Framework of the Ohio Department of Education, which emphasizes “equity” and the “specific needs of individual students” as one of the core tenets of our strategic plan for education. How are the specific needs of LGBTQ+ students being met here? They aren’t.

Ohio already has regulations that govern parental notice, review, and opting out of instruction. And has for a while. This is a non-issue. Public schools are already required to establish policies that allow parents to be actively involved in their children’s education. Parents can attend school board meetings or read the minutes later from home. Parents can attend PTA meetings. Parents can review the lesson plans and homework at any point during the school year. Parents can attend parent-teacher conferences and request additional meetings as necessary. Parents can communicate directly with their children’s teachers. It has never been easier to be involved.

TransOhio is the only state-wide trans-led equality organization, and on behalf of the greater trans community, we are asking you to **stop the politicalization of our existence**. Every single one of us has a gender identity—even you—you’ve probably just never had to take the time for self-examination. Let kids be kids! That includes giving them the space to explore their own personal identities in their own time.

We urge you to **vote no**. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact us with any questions. We welcome further discussion.

Respectfully,
TransOhio Board of Directors