



Opponent Testimony for House Bill 8
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Dr. Christina Collins, Executive Director, Honesty for Ohio Education

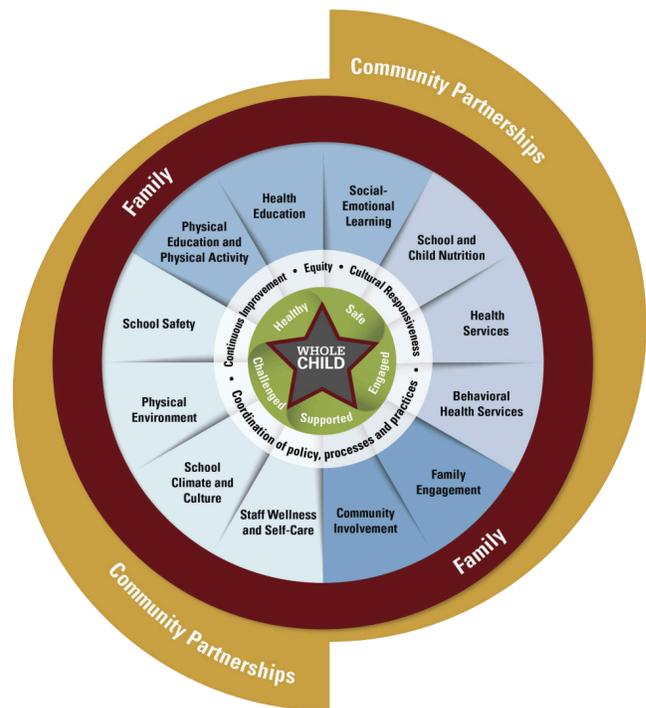
April 22, 2024

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O’Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Christina Collins and I am the executive director of Honesty for Ohio Education. I am also a parent of several children who attend public schools. I want to make clear that Honesty is firmly opposed to HB 8.

[Honesty for Ohio Education](#) is a nonpartisan, statewide coalition representing more than [70](#) 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 center Ohio’s [Whole Child Framework](#) in our work, as we believe that students benefit most when caring families, skilled educators, and health experts work together to create safe and healthy learning environments that are supportive, engaging, and challenging.

Safe and healthy learning spaces reach beyond narrowly defined academic goals to develop young students into thriving adults. 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 and living environments. Better known as the Unsafe Students Act, House Bill 8 would force school districts to out LGBTQ+ 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 2023, the [Trevor Project](#) reported 41% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, with transgender, nonbinary, and LGBTQ+ youth of color reporting higher rates than their peers. Fewer than 40% of LGBTQ+ youth found their homes to be affirming.

Of note, the recent and constant attacks from various bodies of government against LGBTQ+ people are having a direct impact on the mental health of our youth. Nearly 1 in 3 LGBTQ young people said their mental health was poor most of the time or always due to anti-LGBTQ policies and legislation, and nearly 2 in 3 LGBTQ young people said that hearing about potential state or local laws banning or restricting schools from discussing LGBTQ people made their mental health a lot worse.

Schools have been a lifeline for countless students living in fear or suffering abuse at home.

Legislation such as this presumes educators do not know how to handle conversations with students, when in fact, professional best practices already address the issue. For example, 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.

Similarly, the opening language of the bill specifying that schools “shall develop and adopt a policy to promote parental involvement” (page 1, line 15-16) is unnecessary and redundant as it duplicates an existing Ohio Department of Education and Workforce [policy](#) that was created in response to the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. This policy requires that “a written parental involvement policy shall be developed jointly with, agreed upon with, and distributed to parents”. Ohio

districts are already required to create parental advisory committees or a similar strategy allowing parents to review instructional materials and academic curricula presented in the school.

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 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.

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. While you seem relentlessly intent on deciding which children are worthy of feeling safe and accepted, Ohio's most vulnerable young people are experiencing higher rates of discrimination, abuse, illness, and harm.

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

Thank you.

Honesty for Ohio Education

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