

Opponent Testimony for HB 8 – Written-Only

Senate Education Committee

April 22nd, 2024

Harley J. D. Rubin (he/him)

Constituent from Cleveland Heights, Ohio

Master of Social Work candidate at Case Western Reserve University

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

Thank you for considering my testimony. My name is Harley Rubin, and I use he/him pronouns. I am a resident of Cleveland Heights and a second-year Master of Social Work Student at Case Western Reserve University. I am the Master of Social Work Student Representative for the Ohio Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. I am also a transmasculine, genderqueer, bisexual person. **I am writing to urge you to oppose this bill, HB 8, which would endanger LGBTQ+ youth in Ohio and violate the social work professional Code of Ethics.**

While I oppose the entire bill, I am most concerned with the unique risk this bill would pose to students' safety. Along with many of my friends and loved ones, I come from a family that initially strongly rejected my queer identity, and my home life was not safe regardless. I can't imagine what my life would be like if HB 8 existed in my home state. Even though it wasn't always easy, school was where I knew I would be safe, and I was an openly queer high school student. On the days my father would drop me off in the morning, after yelling at me the whole ride, I would come straight into the school counselor's office, crying. **What if I was not afforded that safety, and instead, I couldn't trust my counselors and teachers – often the safest and most trustworthy people in my life?** If a counselor had been forced to call my parents and tell them about my identity, I would've been kicked out of my house or forced to leave to protect my physical safety.

This is not an uncommon story: LGBTQ youth are at more than double the risk of homelessness compared to their peers, and they comprise 40% of the youth homeless population¹. If they do not become fully homeless, these youth could enter the foster care system.

¹ Morton, M. H., Samuels, G. M., Dworsky, A., & Patel, S. (2018). [Missed opportunities: LGBTQ youth homelessness in America](#). Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

As a social work student, I know that this is not what Ohio needs right now. Dr. Dana Prince, my professor, has researched the higher rates of sexual and gender minority youth in the foster care system and their overwhelming disproportionate rates of mental health concerns and suicidality,²³ and HB 8 would exacerbate this issue. A little over a year ago, news outlets reported that hundreds of children in Ohio's foster care system had been sleeping – and sometimes living – in county office buildings when the state could not find foster placements⁴. **Will Ohio be prepared to accept more youth into foster care when they are rejected by their parents because of HB 8?**

Social workers across the state will be impacted by this bill and may be forced to violate the NASW Code of Ethics. Our ethics value a client's right to confidentiality, as well as their autonomy and right to self-determination⁵. School social workers and other school professionals are already mandated to report mental health concerns with imminent risk of harm. By reporting student identities and mental health concerns that are not at imminent risk of harm, counselors would breach confidentiality and undermine student autonomy. This law would become a barrier to building trust with students, and it is at odds with the guiding principles of our profession.

HB 8 would risk students' safety, violate their privacy and autonomy, and ultimately increase the risk of child abuse, youth homelessness, and youth suicide. It would have endangered me as a child, and as an adult, it violates my professional code of ethics as a future social worker. I urge you to oppose HB 8.

Harley J. D. Rubin (he/him)

Master of Social Work Candidate, Case Western Reserve University

² Prince, D. M., Ray-Novak, M., Gillani, B., & Peterson, E. (2022). [Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in foster care: An evidence-based theoretical conceptual model of disproportionality and psychological comorbidities](#). Trauma, violence & abuse.

³ Prince, D. M., Ray-Novak, M., Tossone, K., Peterson, E., Gillani, B., & Mintz, L. (2024). [Psychological comorbidities and suicidality in sexual and gender minority foster youth](#). Children and Youth Services Review.

⁴ Ramlagan, N. (2023). [Ohio's foster care crisis forcing hundreds of kids to sleep in offices](#). Cleveland Scene.

⁵ National Association of Social Workers (2021). [NASW code of ethics](#).