

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and distinguished committee members; sponsors Swearingen and Carruthers:

I speak today in opposition to the so-called "Parents Bill of Rights," a title that I frankly find offensive. It is clear to me that the aim of this bill is not to outline and safeguard the legal rights of all Ohio parents, but rather to target and restrict the existing rights of only certain Ohio children. I urge you to consider the significant harm this bill could inflict on our youth, particularly gender nonconforming students.

First and foremost, I want to emphasize that every student deserves a safe and inclusive educational environment where they can learn, grow, and thrive, regardless of their gender identity or expression. Unfortunately, this bill fails to recognize the diverse experiences of trans, nonbinary, intersex and other gender nonconforming youth, instead reinforcing outdated and harmful stereotypes about gender. And this bill is not advancing alone in a vacuum; it is on the heels of some of the most restrictive anti-trans bills in the history of our state, like bills specifically restricting access to medical care, to school athletic opportunities, to restroom use, etc.

One of the most concerning aspects of this bill is its narrow definition of "biological sex," which ignores the reality of gender nonconforming individuals. By reducing gender to a binary concept based solely on physical characteristics at birth, this bill erases the identities of countless students who do not fit into traditional gender categories. It fails to recognize and affirm the identities of transgender and nonbinary students, potentially leading to feelings of isolation and marginalization. It also does not keep up with the reality that Ohio allows individuals to amend the gender designation on various identity documents. I would advise you to correct your terminology and use "sex assigned at birth," but this body has no business legislating rights based on genitalia.

I am also deeply concerned about the provisions requiring schools to alert parents to "any request by a student to identify as a gender that does not align with the student's biological sex." This required "outing" of gender nonconforming students will undoubtedly erode the trust between students and their teachers but will also likely lead to harm. Students should not be punished for expressing themselves or for seeking guidance and support from trusted adults, like teachers and school counselors.

Furthermore, the provision allowing parents to opt their children out of age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate sexuality education is deeply troubling. This provision could prevent gender nonconforming students from receiving crucial information about sexual health and identity that is relevant to their experiences. All students deserve access to comprehensive sexuality education that is inclusive of diverse identities and

experiences. It's noteworthy that Ohio does not have any statewide requirement for comprehensive sex education. Instead, decisions about sex education are generally left to local school districts. This provision narrows what can be taught, which might lead to even more Ohio schools opting out of teaching sex ed all together. You cannot let your discomfort stunt the education and development of future generations.

Additionally, the emphasis on parental involvement in decisions affecting students' mental, emotional, or physical health could pose significant risks to LGBTQ+ youth. Many gender nonconforming students rely on supportive school personnel for support and resources related to their identity, especially if they are lacking support at home. By restricting school personnel from providing support without explicit parental consent, this bill could further isolate vulnerable students and prevent them from accessing vital support systems. The prohibition on even encouraging students to share information about their mental or emotional wellbeing with their parents could prevent students from accessing crucial support systems. It could also lead to abuse and failures to uncover abuses that would otherwise become apparent if a student were able to confide in a trusted school official instead of fearing that every interaction may result in a call home or worse, that they are forbidden from discussing certain topics entirely.

This bill should be rejected for numerous reasons, including:

Limited Recognition of Gender Identity: The definition of "biological sex" limits gender to a binary concept based solely on physical characteristics at birth, ignoring the experiences of transgender, intersex, and gender nonconforming students.

Lack of Support of Gender Diversity: The focus on traditional concepts of gender and sexuality may contribute to a hostile or unwelcoming school environment for gender nonconforming students and students with gender nonconforming loved ones.

Barriers to Comprehensive Sexual Education: The requirement for age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate sexuality content seems reasonable, but the provision allowing parents to opt their children out of this instruction, particularly regarding sexuality content, could prevent gender nonconforming students from receiving vital information about sexual health and identity that is relevant to their experiences. It also is not clear if it is ever considered appropriate to discuss gender identity, which may lead to a ban on all mentions of trans identities.

Lack of Support for Student Mental Health: The emphasis on parental involvement will create barriers for LGBTQ+, particularly gender nonconforming, students seeking support from school personnel regarding their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Exclusionary Practices in School Policies: Without clear policies and support mechanisms in place, gender nonconforming students may face increased vulnerability to harassment or exclusion within the school environment, especially as this bill seems to be in direct conflict with existing school policies on anti-bullying and student rights.

Overall, this bill's approach to parental involvement, sex education, and student mental health will harm gender nonconforming students. I urge you to reject this bill and instead prioritize policies that promote inclusivity, acceptance, and safety for all students, regardless of their gender identity or expression. Our youth deserve to be affirmed and supported in their schools, not marginalized and erased by harmful legislation.

Please VOTE NO. Thank you.

Parent's Bill of Rights

As parents, we believe in the inherent rights and responsibilities that come with raising and nurturing our children. We advocate for policies and practices that uphold these fundamental principles, ensuring the wellbeing, safety, and appropriate development of our children. Therefore, parents and legal guardians shall have protected their rights under the following Parents' Bill of Rights:

- (1) Right to Education:
 - (a) Parents have the right to ensure that their children receive a high-quality education that is accessible, equitable, and inclusive of diverse backgrounds and abilities.
 - (b) Parents have the right to transparency and involvement in decisions related to our children's education, including curriculum, school policies, and extracurricular activities, including but not limited to regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences and progress reports.
- (2) Right to Health and Safety:
 - (a) Parents have the right to access the following:
 - (i) appropriate and affordable healthcare services,
 - (ii) safe and supportive school environments, and
 - (iii) protection from harm, discrimination, and violence in Ohio schools.
- (3) Right to Equitable Opportunities:
 - (a) Parents have the right to advocate for equal opportunities and resources for their children, regardless of their socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.
- (4) Right to Religious and Cultural Expression:
 - (a) Parents have the right to raise their children according to their religious and cultural beliefs, values, and practices.
 - (b) Parents and their children shall enjoy protection from unlawful discrimination based on religious or cultural identity.
- (5) Right to Family Unity and Support:
 - (a) Parents have the right to maintain family unity and receive support in fulfilling their parental responsibilities, regardless of what that family structure looks like.
- (6) Right to Opt-Out:
 - (a) Parents have the right to opt their child out of specific educational programs or activities that they believe are not in their child's best interest, such as certain standardized tests, surveys, or classroom materials.
- (7) Right to Transparent Communication:
 - (a) Parents have the right to clear and timely communication from educators and school administrators regarding their child's academic performance, behavior, and any concerns that may arise.
- (8) Right to Appeal:
 - (a) Parents have the right to appeal decisions made by school officials that affect their child's education, such as disciplinary actions, placement in special education programs, or eligibility for certain services or accommodations.
 - (b) Parents have the right to a fair and impartial appeals process.
- (9) Right to Advocate for Children's Rights:
 - (a) Parents have the right to advocate for the rights and best interests of their children, both individually and collectively.
- (10) Right to Love and Nurture:
 - (a) Above all, parents have the right to love, nurture, and support their children unconditionally, recognizing and celebrating their unique identities, talents, and aspirations.