

## **Testimony Opposing Ohio House Bill 8**

Brittnee Lydy  
Parent, Teacher

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Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in opposition to Ohio House Bill 8. My name is Brittnee Lydy, and I am both a parent of children enrolled in Ohio's public education system as well as an award-winning teacher with over 20 years of experience supporting students and families across Ohio. In that time, I have seen firsthand how trust between students and teachers is foundational to their success, not just academically but socially and emotionally.

I am deeply concerned that this bill will have unintended and damaging consequences, particularly by undermining the trust that allows students to seek help from their teachers and other school staff.

### **The Importance of Trust in the Classroom**

As a teacher, I am often one of the first adults outside of a student's family to notice when something is wrong. Over the years, I've had students confide in me about deeply personal challenges—things like struggles with mental health, difficulties at home, or conflicts with peers.

For example, I once had a student quietly share during a study hall that they were feeling overwhelmed by family pressures and didn't know who to talk to. Because of the trust we had built, I was able to connect them with a counselor, who then worked with the student and their family to address the issue together.

Another time, a student hesitated for weeks before finally disclosing that they were being bullied. The student was afraid to tell anyone but trusted me to help them navigate the situation. We were able to involve the appropriate school staff and parents to resolve the issue without escalating their anxiety or breaking their confidence.

These kinds of conversations happen because students feel safe confiding in their teachers. House Bill 8 risks taking that away by creating an environment where students fear their personal concerns will immediately and automatically be shared, regardless of the context.

### **The Role of Teachers as Mandatory Reporters**

Ohio law already holds educators accountable as mandatory reporters. This means that if a student discloses information suggesting they are being abused, neglected, or in danger, we are legally and ethically required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

This is an essential safeguard for children and a responsibility I take very seriously. However, this existing legal framework already ensures that we involve the necessary parties—including families—when a student is at risk. House Bill 8 adds an unnecessary layer that could confuse or hinder this process by forcing disclosures in situations that may not meet the threshold for mandatory reporting but still require sensitive handling.

For example, I have had students confide in me about mental health struggles or conflicts at home that were not abusive but still deeply concerning. Because of the trust we had, I was able to connect

these students with counselors and involve families in a thoughtful and supportive way. If students fear that any personal issue they share will be automatically disclosed to their families without their input or context, they will be far less likely to speak up.

### **Breaking Down Family-School Partnerships**

I want to emphasize that teachers do not replace parents or guardians. We are here to support students and collaborate with families. The situations I have described ended positively because I worked with students to ensure their families were appropriately involved, in ways that maintained the student's trust.

But trust is fragile. If students believe that anything they share will result in immediate disclosure without their input, many will simply stop talking. This not only isolates students but also makes it harder for families to be part of the solution.

### **A Path Forward**

I know we all share the goal of strengthening the bond between schools and families. But this bill does not achieve that—it will create barriers between students and the very adults who are here to support them.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge you to oppose House Bill 8.