

December 7, 2024

Hello,

My name is Finnick Vest, and I am an art educator in Ohio. I am also a transgender man. I realized I was transgender in high school, and began to socially transition when I was sixteen.

There was one teacher I told about this. Just one. I told her because I intended to start physically transitioning the day I turned eighteen. I wanted her to know in case she noticed I was looking or acting differently in a few months. She listened, asked a few questions, and asked me if I wanted to go by Finnick in class. I said no, not yet. I had classmates that had been negative about LGBTQ+ issues in the past.

At that point in my life, I was being bullied and harassed about my gender. Not by my friends, classmates, or teachers, but by my legal guardian. I wanted to wear cargo shorts, but if she saw me, I'd have been grounded. When she was upset with me, she called me slurs and names. She made fun of my appearance, my friendships, my relationships. I was ridiculed to the point of living on my grandmother's couch instead of interacting with her. This only happened after I came out and expressed wanting to be a man.

I wanted therapy. She wouldn't take me. I wanted medical help. She wouldn't take me. I wanted acceptance and support. She wouldn't give it. She even stopped taking me to my college courses. I had to depend on everyone but her. Seven years later, on her deathbed, her treatment of me was one of her regrets. She wished she could take it back. But she couldn't.

All I at the time were any books about being transgender I could get my hands on, and a binder I had bought secretly and hid every night.

If my teacher had reported our conversation to my guardian, the emotional abuse would have intensified. I would have been screamed and cussed at, my phone would have been broken, my binder found and thrown away. In reflection, I might've killed myself. I had been suicidal for years.

The language in this bill is vague, and its only purpose is to denigrate a small population of people who already face discrimination at every turn. You all already made it so I can't use the men's restroom at my place of work. Now you want me to out my students? I won't.

All this bill does is add pointless paperwork to school districts and promote the othering and bullying of gender-variant children. If this was about mental health, the gender identity portion would not be included. Being transgender is not a mental illness, and has not been considered

one in over a decade.

According to the bill: "Sexuality content" means any oral or written instruction, presentation, image, or description of sexual concepts or gender ideology.

Is my colleague having a picture of her wife on her desk sexuality content? Is mentioning Keith Haring in my art class sexuality content? Is showing artwork by Frida Kahlo gender ideology? Are bathroom signs gender ideology? Is my name plate "Mr. Vest" gender ideology? Is telling students to not use the term gay as an insult sexuality content?

The amount of books that schools would pull due to this vague language is appalling, and terrifying. There used to be mountains of books on transgender people in the early twentieth century. It was all burned, destroyed, and banned on May 6th, 1933.

By restricting what students can read and have access to, you are restricting knowledge. You are restricting education, and in turn you are restricting freedom. Just like what happened on that dreadful night in Germany.

Leave my students and me out of your political games. I am an Ohio taxpayer, I am an American citizen, I am a certified educator, I am transgender, and I am not your pawn in a political spat.

I oppose HB 8 for what it is. A hate filled, political ploy to undermine public education and to inspire fear into children.

Thank you for your time.

Notes: In Weimar Germany, the gay Jewish doctor Magnus Hirschfeld performed the first gender-affirming surgeries and collected research on sexuality. The 1933 book burnings destroyed his life's work

With the publication of DSM-5 in 2013, "gender identity disorder" was eliminated and replaced with "gender dysphoria." This change further focused the diagnosis on the gender identity-related distress that some transgender people experience.