

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony. My name is Ty Coy. I am a licensed social worker in Ohio. I strongly oppose House Bill 8.

I agree that “a parent has a fundamental right to make decisions concerning the upbringing, education, and care of the parent's child.” When a parent sends their child to public school, they entrust the institution also to be concerned for their child’s upbringing, education, and care. I caution this committee to use dog whistle politics surrounding the indoctrination of children in public schools to inform the enactment of legislation. Political pundits have sexualized LGBTQ+ people, which paints the mere existence of LGBTQ+ people as taboo. I urge you to oppose this bill to uphold the humanity of all Ohioans.

This bill, if enacted, would further erode trust in our public institutions. It frames teachers and school staff as malicious. In reality, they are often the only safe figures in a student’s life. If this legislature emboldens parents to censor education around LGBTQ+ people, then students will become further emboldened to bully LGBTQ+ people. I am proud to have attended public schools through graduate school. Oftentimes, school was the safest place for me. That adults accepted me was affirming and validating. But this wasn’t always the case. Students bullied me dozens of times, with school faculty and administration acting as mere bystanders. Under a post-HB 8 Ohio, not only would faculty be absolved of responsibility for resolving this conflict, but they would also potentially create an additional conflict by introducing it into what could be a hostile home environment.

Growing up, I couldn’t express my identity at home. I came out at school before coming out to my family. If passed, House Bill 8 would force all teachers and school staff to out LGBTQ+ students to their parents. This could have had devastating consequences on me as a child. This bill is dangerous for LGBTQ+ students, particularly for trans and nonbinary students. Parents are often unsupportive of their LGBTQ+ children, which is why the student may not come out at home in the first place. Some go as far as to kick their children out to live on the streets. To require public employees to be vigilantes of LGBTQ+ identities is absurd. Liberty is a value I know almost all Ohioans share, but this proposed government oversight in schools is oppressive.

This bill would further marginalize LGBTQ+ young people (ages 13–24), who are already more than **four times as likely** to attempt suicide than their peers, and **at least one attempts suicide every 45 seconds**.¹ 41% of LGBTQ+ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.²

¹ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/article/facts-about-lgbtq-youth-suicide/>

² *Id.*

HB 8 would further widen the knowledge gap of LGBTQ+ health. I never once encountered education about LGBTQ+ sexuality in my K–12 education. I was left to Google how to practice safe sex. Some LGBTQ+ people face an increased risk for HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).³ This bill could threaten public health. Suppose this legislature is truly concerned for the wellbeing of Ohioans. In that case, it will afford its students the opportunity to learn about inclusive sex, not tuck it away like it doesn't exist. Like LGBTQ+ people don't exist. The invalidation of people in spaces meant to educate and care for them has a traumatic effect. Although this bill purports to prioritize student health and wellbeing, if enacted, it would open the doors to weather LGBTQ+ people down even more.

As a therapist, I constantly work to help LGBTQ+ people cope with the trauma of being discriminated against and prejudiced by public institutions. Bills like this induce fear in us. You have the power to create a safer, more inclusive environment for all Ohioans. To make us feel seen, not ashamed for merely existing.

Isn't this legislature concerned with rectifying, not reifying the oppression of LGBTQ+ people in its schools?

I urge you to consider my testimony and vote no on this oppressive bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Ty Coy, MSW, LSW

³ <https://www.lgbtqihealtheducation.org/publication/addressing-hiv-and-sexually-transmitted-infections-among-lgbtq-people-a-primer-for-health-centers/>