

As a proud public school educator, I must speak in opposition of this bill. This bill would endanger children with families who do not support the identities they hold. It is yet another attack on the existence of our queer youth. These students deserve a safe space to be who they are. Sadly, home is not always that place. A student should not fear being their authentic self at school because a teacher might be mandated to out them to their families. According to research shared by Youth.gov, “studies, as well as anecdotal evidence from social service professionals, suggest that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, or intersex (LGBTQI+) youth are significantly overrepresented in homeless populations. Finding that LGBTQI+ young adults experience homelessness at more than twice the rate of their peers.” Forcing teachers to out their students to potentially unsupportive families will significantly impact this already disproportionate number of homeless LGBTQ+ youth.

Additionally, the children who are not kicked out, often face trauma in the home. Queer children have a significantly higher likelihood of experiencing adverse childhood experiences (or ACEs) compared to their straight peers. Just a few of the statistics, as reported by Vanderbilt University Medical Center, 83% of queer youth report experiencing ACEs. With 30% experiencing sexual abuse (compared to 13% of their peers), 57% experiencing emotional abuse (compared to 33% of their peers), and 40% experiencing physical abuse (compared to 24% of their peers).

I have dedicated my life to supporting students in and out of the classroom, and as a highly educated professional in my field, with multiple degrees and licenses, I would sooner leave the field of education than to knowingly share information on one of my students that would cause them to be unsafe in their own home. As educators, per The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, we are mandated reporters. This distinction tasks us with reporting if a child

is known to have been or suspected of being abused— and charging us with civil or criminal penalties if we fail to do so. Why then, could we be required to share something about a student that would cause us to knowingly put them in danger.

I am once again here to remind you that when you agreed to take on this role, you agreed to serve the people. That did not and does not mean only the people whose existence you agree with. Queer youth will not be legislated out of existence. It is your job to protect them. I urge you to show the next generation that you believe they ALL deserve a future. Do not pass House Bill 8.