

December 8, 2024

Dear Senator Brenner and the Senate Education Committee,

I am a parent and business owner who chose to return to Ohio to raise my child. I am also a deeply concerned citizen who opposes policies that foster hate or harm in Ohio's schools. For these reasons, I am submitting this opponent testimony to urge you to oppose HB 8 and ensure it does not advance.

There are several compelling reasons to reject this bill. First, the "oversight" proposed in HB 8 risks creating a climate of intimidation and distrust for educators. By encouraging distrust and micromanagement of educators, this bill undermines the safe, supportive relationships that are essential among students, families, educators, and school leaders.

Second, this legislation would further strain an education system already under immense pressure. Ohio's schools are grappling with critical challenges, including a statewide teacher shortage, learning loss from the COVID-19 pandemic, chronic underfunding, increased mental health needs for students, and the ongoing fear and trauma caused by incidents of gun violence. HB 8 would only exacerbate these existing challenges for educators and students alike.

Third, and most critically, the language in this bill poses significant harm to LGBTQ+ students. Mandating that districts report "changes to a student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being" to parents is effectively a directive to out LGBTQ+ students, often without their consent. Releasing this sensitive information without a student's permission can cause severe trauma and even put their safety at risk. Schools must be a sanctuary for students, where they feel supported and respected. This bill directly contradicts the Ohio Department of Education's Whole Child Framework, which emphasizes equity and meeting the unique needs of individual students as cornerstones of our state's educational vision.

At the federal level, leaders across the political spectrum, including conservative lawmakers and the White House, have rejected similar legislation. Ohio should not follow a path that leads to more harm and divisiveness. I urge you to stand against HB 8 and prevent Ohio from becoming a symbol of intolerance.

Please oppose this harmful legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa F. Lazarus", with a stylized, flowing script.

Lisa F. Lazarus