

Opponent Testimony for Bill Number 8

Senate Education Committee

Dec 8 2024

Josh Coen

Self Representing

Chair Andrew O. Brenner, Vice Chair Sandra O'Brien, Ranking Member Catherine D. Ingram, and members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Josh Coen and my pronouns are they/them. I am a trans unemployed adult who is building my community in Canal Winchester by education, advocacy, and future volunteer work. I oppose this bill, however with note to page four, due to politically charged language, disregard for student safety, and disregard for the stability of the already strained education system.

I am privileged to have grown up in a well funded public school. I saw my queer peers and was able to freely imbibe information pertaining to the intricacies of gender roles, race, and capital with the ability to draw my independent conclusions. Even though I had no threat of being outed to my family, the regularly explicit culture of hostility kept me in the closet until after I graduated. I could never imagine what kind of fears queer youth are facing with the direct ire of the very state that is stated to protect them. Had this bill passed in my earlier years I would have held back much of the struggle I truly experienced, I would have had a much heavier load upon my shoulders just trying to get by with the everpresent increase of pressure to perform to a higher standard.

This bill's language defines "sexuality content" as "any oral or written instruction, presentation, image, or description of sexual concepts or gender ideology", specifying the distinction between sexuality content and venereal disease education, childhood sexual abuse prevention, and sexual violence prevention. It also defines "student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being" as including "Any request by a student to identify as a gender that does not align with the student's biological sex", with that being said, the bill stresses that parents will be informed of any sexuality content or of any changes to a student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being. This single aspect of the bill, without any disregard to the weight of the statement, is an attack on the queer youth in the state of Ohio. Educators would be at the whims of sponsors, committees, and increased scrutiny for trying to protect this already vulnerable population. It puts strain on the trust between educators and families and the potential danger this poses to students goes against the Whole Child Framework emphasizing "equity and [the] specific needs of individual students" as one of the core tenets of our strategic plan for education. Alongside this, federally, even conservative congress members have expressed disagreement with the bill's intent and scope. The White House has additionally stated that this type of legislation puts lgbt+ students at risk, politicizes education, and fails to deliver the resources student and families need.

I am testifying in opposition to this bill to make clear the imperative of our state to protect the safety of lgbt+ youth. If put into place, House Bill 8 will put already at risk students in a further line of scrutiny, alongside straining the relationship and capability of educators to serve students and their families. I ask the committee to please consider my testimony and the testimony of all who also oppose this bill.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.