

Opponent Testimony for House Bill 8
Senate Education Committee
December 8, 2024
Megan O'Donnell

To the Honorable Members of the Ohio House,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding House Bill 8.

As a concerned Ohioan, I strongly oppose this legislation due to its harmful implications for students, educators, and families across our state. While I understand the intent to involve parents in their children's education, this bill creates significant barriers to providing inclusive, supportive environments for all students and undermines the expertise of educators and school staff.

Concerns About Defining “Biological Sex” and “Sexuality”

By narrowly defining "biological sex" and excluding acknowledgment of gender as a spectrum, House Bill 8 invalidates the lived experiences of transgender and nonbinary students. This approach disregards well-established medical and psychological understandings of gender and alienates some of our most vulnerable youth. Such definitions create a hostile environment, exacerbating stigma and mental health challenges.

The bill's vague definition of “sexuality” also risks censoring critical conversations about respect, diversity, and understanding. Preventing open discussions about gender identity and related topics erodes the ability of schools to foster environments where all students feel safe, valued, and included.

Barriers to Mental Health Support

The bill's requirements for parental notification regarding any changes to a student's mental or emotional health services place undue burdens on students who may not feel safe disclosing sensitive information to their families. This provision could deter students from seeking help, potentially leading to tragic outcomes for those struggling with suicidal ideation, depression, or severe anxiety. Schools play a vital role in early intervention and support, and restricting their ability to act confidentially when necessary jeopardizes student well-being.

Impact on Educators and Schools

HB 8 imposes additional administrative burdens on already overextended educators and school administrators, requiring detailed policies, notifications, and processes. This focus on bureaucracy detracts from time and resources that should be spent on teaching and supporting students.

Further, the bill's provision allowing parents to object to instructional content and opt their children out of specific classes could lead to inconsistent and inequitable educational experiences. Educators should be trusted as professionals to deliver developmentally appropriate instruction that prepares students for the complexities of the world.

Erosion of Trust and Safety

House Bill 8 creates a climate of mistrust, pitting parents, educators, and students against each other. Schools should be places where students feel supported, not scrutinized or excluded. This bill's emphasis on parental rights over the expertise of educators undermines the collaborative relationship that is essential for student success.

Conclusion

I urge you to reconsider the sweeping restrictions and implications of House Bill 8. Rather than fostering collaboration and inclusivity, this bill would harm students, limit critical support systems, and hinder educators from fulfilling their mission to provide safe and supportive learning environments.

Ohio's students deserve better. They deserve an education system that values diversity, promotes understanding, and ensures access to the resources and support they need to thrive. I respectfully request that you vote **no** on House Bill 8.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Megan O'Donnell (she/her)
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