



Ohio Senate Education Committee | Testimony in Opposition to HB 8 | December 10, 2024

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony **in opposition to House Bill 8**.

My name is Dwayne Steward, I use he/him pronouns and I am the new Executive Director of Equality Ohio. We are a 20-year strong organization providing advocacy and legal support to Ohio's LGBTQ+ community. Our mission is to create lived and legal equality for all Ohioians.

But I come before you today not only as the Executive Director of Equality Ohio, but also as a father. Because if HB 8 becomes law, my family and my history will be erased from existence in our school system. And my son will be robbed of the opportunity to see examples of his family in his education.

If HB 8 passes, there is a lack of definition in the language that will be used as a weapon to erase LGBTQ+ communities. Which is exactly what has happened when similar bills like this have been passed in other states.

Imagine growing up and seeing no one that looked like you in the books or media that you consumed as a child. Sadly, I don't have to imagine it because, as a black gay man, this is what I experienced.

I didn't discover someone like Bayard Rustin and his amazing contributions to the Civil Rights Movement, until I was in college. For those of you unfamiliar with Bayard Rustin, he is known as an originator of nonviolent protest theology and the architect of the Civil Rights Movement, because he was the creator and lead organizer of the 1964 March on Washington where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his infamous "I Have a Dream Speech." He was also a proud openly gay man. I wish I would have had the opportunity to learn about Rustin and his immense contributions to our world in school growing up. It would've normalized my existence to myself and others, which would have eliminated



the severe bullying I would experience throughout grade school and high school, as a black queer child growing up in a small rural town.

However, the most egregious part of HB 8, is the forced outing clause, which requires teachers and administrators to alert parents if a child discloses their sexuality or gender identity at school.

First, the clause itself is extremely vague and offers no detail or guidance regarding how a teacher should officially respond when a student brings up their sexual orientation or gender identity. Also you'd be taking away a crucial lifeline for LGBTQ kids. More than 40% of LGBTQ+ young people have seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. This number is more than 50% for transgender and nonbinary young people. And research shows that one supportive adult in an LGBTQ+ child's life decreases that child's chances of attempting suicide by 30%. In most cases that supportive adult is a teacher or guidance counselor.

It's also important to note that LGBTQ+ young people are not inherently prone to suicide risk because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, but rather they are placed at higher risk because of how they are mistreated and stigmatized in society. This legislation especially perpetuates this stigma.

The forced-outing provision in HB 8 will also lead to higher rates of abuse in the home for LGBTQ+ youth. 60% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+ and in an overwhelming majority of these cases these youth are homeless because of family rejection after disclosing their identity to their family.

There is no body of research that proves the need for this legislation or any other anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, for that matter. However, there is a large body of research that shows how anti-LGBTQ+ legislation hurts my family and families like mine. Recent surveys in Ohio have shown:



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- The overwhelming majority (92%) of LGBTQ+ young people said their well-being was negatively impacted due to recent politics.
- Over half (52%) of LGBTQ+ young people said that they or their family considered moving to a different state because of anti-LGBTQ+ politics and laws.
- Anti-transgender state-level laws directly cause up to a 72% increase in suicide attempts among transgender and nonbinary young people.

I end this testimony where I began, with the hope of a father. When I look at my son. I see hope. I see possibility. I see the legacy of myself and my ancestors. This legislation erases me, it erases him, and anyone like us. Refusing to allow LGBTQ+ stories in education erases the ability for me and my community to leave a legacy for the next generation. As you think about moving HB 8 forward I want you to ask yourself, why is your legacy more important than mine? If we are to truly uphold a democratic society free of discrimination that is based on prosperity for all, the answer should surely be, “No”. Which would also mean a “No” vote on this legislation.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony. **I urge the committee to oppose HB 8.**