

## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Delivered December 9, 2024 by

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Members of the Education Committee of The Ohio Senate:

By way of introduction, my name is Dr. Jamie Marich, a licensed professional clinical counselor here in the state of Ohio and I am also internationally known as an author and specialist in the field of trauma and addiction recovery. You can learn more about what I do both inside and outside of the State of Ohio at my website: [www.jamiemarich.com](http://www.jamiemarich.com) I am originally from Youngstown and currently live in Bath Twp. and my businesses, The Institute for Creative Mindfulness and Redefine Therapy are registered in the State of Ohio. The Institute for Creative Mindfulness is one of the top five largest providers in North America of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy, an evidence-based trauma therapy.

I am delivering this testimony in strong opposition to HB8. I will explain my position both as a professional mental health counselor and trauma educator, and a person with lived experience of growing up queer/bisexual in a dysfunctional, religious home. Plainly, I would not be alive today if I did not have the experience I did at Chaney High School, a public high school in Youngstown, Ohio, to confide in my amazing guidance counselor, the late Mrs. Valerie Leone. Interestingly, Mrs. Leone knew my mother since my mother was an administration in the Youngstown City Schools. Mrs. Leone was well aware of the turbulence of my home life and the added pressure that the religious conflict in my home added to my life and she was indeed my safe haven. Having this experience at a public high school was especially necessary after nine years spent at a Catholic elementary school.

While the war against LGBTQ+ children, especially trans children in this conservative state heavily influenced by certain types of the Christian religion is not new, HB8 is especially concerning because its passage will lead to greater mental health distress, especially self-injury and suicidal ideation if not completed attempts. I can say that confidently as a clinical trauma professional who has a special passion for working with fellow LGBTQ+ people and those who have experienced spiritual and religious trauma, in the home. Many of the proponents of this bill will claim that parents have a right to raise their children as they see fit and complain that educators, coaches, therapists, and secular society are “indoctrinating” their children into more progressive views of life and sexuality. Yet never once do



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these proponents seem to consider how religious indoctrination is the real harm to the children of our great state. Children have the right to self-determination and freedom from such harmful religious indoctrination that would have them believe that they are condemned to hell or unworthy for being who they are meant to be in this world and having the chance to explore their identity without judgment.

In October 2024, after having fifteen books and manuals in the field of trauma recovery published by five different national publishers, one of my long-term publishers released my memoir, *You Lied to Me About God: A Memoir*. In this work I shared experiences of what it was like to grow up with one conservative Evangelical parent and one Catholic parent. I share how people like Mrs. Leone made a life-changing impact on me. And while I will gladly make the entire memoir available to you, there is one particular passage on so-called “Parent’s Rights” that I wish to highlight as part of this testimony:

No, parents often do not know what is best for their children’s mental health and development, especially if the extremism of their religious beliefs prevent them from seeing their children as they are. Often, their professed religious beliefs just provide a cover for the potency of their hatred toward others. And this is where I’ve struggled, especially, as I’m writing this in 2023, seeing states like Florida pass what is colloquially termed the *Don’t Say Gay* bill, and other states following suit with legislation that puts more control into the hands of parents. Ratting out or informing on a child about how they present themselves at school or in therapy can be detrimental to the overall health of a child, especially if they are trying to survive as someone who is queer, gender expansive, or just *different* from how their parents believe the world should be.

When I was growing up, it didn’t even cross my mind to be myself at school, especially because it was a Catholic school. I didn’t even know what therapy was as a child. That’s how tight the chains of control remained on my developing personhood. I smile when I realize that today many children are getting the safe enough spaces that they need at school, with therapists, or in other social settings to at least begin exploring without judgment. Maybe they can begin to break free and be themselves before adulthood, because many of us who are queer do not make it very far into adulthood, or we spend much of our adulthood still weighed down, like a dying branch that is struggling to stay alive on an unhealthy family tree.

*You Lied to Me About God: A Memoir* (J. Marich, North Atlantic Books, 2024; pp. 31-32)

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Jamie Marich

Bath, Ohio