

Testimony in Opposition to H.B. 8
Nolan McHugh, High School Government Teacher
Senate Education Committee

Chair Brenner, Vice-Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for your time and for providing the opportunity to hear my testimony.

My name is Nolan McHugh, and I am a teacher of American Government and Psychology in northwest Ohio. I am writing this testimony in full-throated opposition to the outwardly homophobic and transphobic H.B. 8. Chair Brenner, I'm hopeful that for this testimony hearing you'll be safe and secure in the capitol, rather than cruising down the highway as you (allegedly) were on May 3, 2021, which should have resulted in 2 points on your driver's license and up to a \$150 fine¹, but as an elected Republican legislator, I'm not surprised to see that you feel above the law.

I'll get straight to the point here, as I'm well aware that none of you will be reading this, and instead the tedious task will be offloaded to an underpaid staffer whose labor rights, wages, and benefits Chair Brenner and his party are so honorably working to undermine.

If you vote in favor of H.B. 8, history will remember you as a hateful bigot. Now, I know, "history" doesn't have a donor network of lavishly wealthy evangelical fundamentalists and business interests motivated to scapegoat a marginalized group to increase its chances of electoral success, BUT! Maybe, I don't know, consider this thing called... a conscience? These laws actually have consequences, did you know? **The Trevor Project² found that hateful laws like H.B. 8 increase suicide attempts among trans youth by 72%**

Don't be a bully. Don't be a bigot. Just be a kind person. Vote no on H.B. 8. Your descendants will look upon your hateful decisions with shame, disgust, and rage. You may be well-fed, exorbitantly adorned, and scornful of the very working class communities you represent, Chair Brenner, but, as Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. said, "...the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice." Sorry, I've got to teach the Civil Rights movement while it's still legal and not a "controversial topic" that "parental rights" can upend.

H.B. 8's contents *only* serve to make the lives of gay and transgender students much more stressful and difficult than they already are. The main provisions include requiring that parents be informed of any impossibly vaguely defined "sexuality content" presented in class, and that students be permitted to be excused from class and permitted to take an alternate course if they

¹ [Phones Down. It's the Law. | Ohio Department of Transportation](#)

² [Anti-Transgender Laws Cause up to 72% Increase in Suicide Attempts Among Transgender and Nonbinary Youth. Study Shows | The Trevor Project](#)

or their parents desire. Are we serious? The Republican “definition” of “sexuality content” is impressively nebulous: “any oral or written instruction, presentation, image, or description of sexual concepts or gender ideology.”

I’ve taught many gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer students. What are you telling them, Chair Brenner? Their existence is invalid? Their classmates should be allowed to take an “alternate course” because they breathe air and exist near them? You do not, can not, and never will even begin to fathom the level of identity crisis, dysphoria, and personal struggle that an LGBTQ+ teen will experience in a rural setting in Ohio. On top of their own personal journey, they are subjected to frequent bullying and harassment, spurred on by YOU, Chair Brenner, and your pitiful excuse for a party. Bullying vulnerable kids? Attempting to force educators to out them to their parents and families when this could result, in many cases, in this child’s mental health and safety plummeting? The only thing you are accomplishing here, Chair Brenner, is the reckless endangerment of a young, marginalized group. Like I stated earlier, **The Trevor Project³ found that hateful laws like H.B. 8 increase suicide attempts among trans youth by 72%.**

Although I’m sure, Chair Brenner, you and your Republican colleagues could not give the faintest whisper of a care about the health and safety of transgender youth. You only care about the health and safety of your neatly gerrymandered districts, which is why your party intentionally deceived the public with unashamedly false language contained in Issue 1 last month, but I digress.

Let’s return to that impossible-to-pin-down definition of “sexuality content”: “any oral or written instruction, presentation, image, or description of sexual concepts or gender ideology.” I suppose I should scrap the content in my AP Psychology course, covered on the AP exam for students’ college credit, concerning anything related to gender or sexuality. I’ll let them take their own guesswork. I suppose I should scrap anything related to Obergefell v. Hodges⁴ in my AP Government and Politics course, a required Supreme Court case for the AP Exam. We’ll let them do their own guesswork too. I know! I’ve got a great idea! What if we only taught material that produces an ignorant and uninformed population ready and willing to vote for a party dominated by obscenely wealthy capitalists and religious fundamentalists hellbent on decimating the civil rights of marginalized communities and accelerating an enormous transfer of wealth from the working class to the owning class? That would be great! Chair Brenner, I’m sure you and your party’s donors would be enthralled, particularly the for-profit charter schools!⁵

³ [Anti-Transgender Laws Cause up to 72% Increase in Suicide Attempts Among Transgender and Nonbinary Youth. Study Shows | The Trevor Project](#)

⁴ [AP United States Government and Politics Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary](#)

⁵ [Andrew O Brenner Top Contributors • OpenSecrets](#)

I just love that definition, don't you? So usefully vague in stoking hate against the LGBTQ+ community, which can prove to be a great electoral strategy, don't you think? Look at it: "any oral or written instruction, presentation, image, or description of sexual concepts or gender ideology." Sorry, English teachers, you're no longer allowed to teach *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Macbeth*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Odyssey*, frankly any despicably and decidedly PERVERTED (through the infinite wisdom of the Ohio Republican party bankrolled by obscenely wealthy evangelical groups who've forgotten it's easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle...) romances included within these texts. You may think that I'm exaggerating, but according to the text of this bill, that is perfectly within your "parental rights".

I sincerely appreciate your unfettered efforts, Chair Brenner, to oppose the woke mob and make the jobs of all of us severely underpaid educators far more difficult. It truly is just an honor to submit this written testimony, and I wish I had the privilege to be in your presence in person, m'lord.

I said it earlier, I'll say it again. Don't be a bully. Don't be a bigot. Just be a kind person. Vote no on H.B. 8. Your descendants will look upon your hateful decisions with shame, disgust, and rage. You may be well-fed, exorbitantly adorned, and scornful of the very working class communities you represent, Chair Brenner, but, as Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. said, "...the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice." Sorry, I've got to teach the Civil Rights movement while it's still legal and not a "controversial topic" that "parental rights" can upend.