

Dear esteemed legislative members,

I am writing in regards to my concerns on HB 8 Bill. The concerns I have stem from being a parent to an individual that identifies with the LGBTQIA+ community. Speaking on my on behalf, parents are already stretched thin. There are times that the support of counselors and teachers within the school system can serve to assist children who are in crisis.

My child, while in school, struggled with his identity and with bullying. As a parent, I knew very little of what he dealt with during the school day. I did take action to ensure that he was able to speak to a therapist, as his mental welfare was of concern to me. Our lives were in turmoil as a result of my youngest child, who has profound autism. As I dealt with the issues of autism, I needed to know that the needs of my oldest child were indeed being met.

Let me advise you, that I have always known that my child was part of the LGBTQIA+ community. No discussion with a teacher or counselor made them that way. There is no television show that they watched or music that they listened to that made them that way.

When my oldest child was able, they shared their story with us. Please know, that if this were something that these individuals could choose, most would not choose this life. The ridicule and pain that they feel within this marginalized community is extensive. I admire their bravery to stand tall and share love and understanding over hate and fear.

At a time when mental health is considered a crisis, I believe it is very unwise to restrict teachers and counselors from discussing issues with these individuals. People who are already marginalized, bullied, and afraid of how others will react to such discussions. If they are brave enough to engage the conversation with anyone, it would be my hope that that person would recognize their bravery and treat them as they would want to be treated. If mental health is a crisis, do not put those that are there to support individuals in a straight jacket and restraints. Paralyzing and rendering them useless to help individuals in crisis.

Please be careful and consider that this bill may cause great harm. Be cautious, it may do great harm to someone that you love. Or, you could err on the side of love. Do not censor and restrict discussions because it is something with which you do not agree. Instead, meet them where they are. Have a candid conversation of the issues that they face. And if you can not do that, then please let the people who can and will do it.