

Opponent Testimony for House Bill 8
Ohio Senate Education Committee
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Bastian Jones
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio Speakers Bureau

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Bastian Jones, and my pronouns are he/him. I am a bisexual transgender man living in Cincinnati. I am here to oppose House Bill 8 in its entirety.

Every person has the right to make informed decisions about their body and health. House Bill 8 makes this impossible by limiting students' access to medically-accurate sex education, which necessarily includes education on sexuality and gender identity. I have been aware of my sexuality and gender identity since I was fourteen, though it was never discussed in schools when I attended. This was to my detriment in many ways. Without comprehensive sex education, I didn't realize I needed to use protection to keep me safe from STIs, even when I was having sex with people who could not get me pregnant. Without discussions of healthy chest-flattening practices, I used unsafe methods of compressing my breast tissue. Adults' inability to talk to me about diverse experiences didn't keep me from harm. On the contrary, it propagated preventable harm.

My experiences are not unique. When I was in school, I had friends and peers who were similarly harmed by the silence around LGBTQ+ people and topics. By making these discussions illegal, as House Bill 8 aims to do, our youth will be at an even greater risk than I was. The adults charged with supporting them will be unable to help them without legal risk. We have the opportunity to give children the tools they need to make the best decisions for their health and happiness. Instead, House Bill 8 would create another generation of children whose safety and health are put in jeopardy.

This bill has been dubbed the Unsafe Students Act, but it is clear to me that the true threat to the safety of students is a lack of accurate and precise knowledge, including a diverse depiction of experiences that they might relate to. If House Bill 8 passes, it will harm LGBTQ+ students and everyone who loves them. That is why I ask you to consider my experiences as an LGBTQ+ child, teenager, and student, and to vote no on House Bill 8.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.