

My name is Dr. Shirley Lange and I have been a licensed psychologist in the state of Ohio since 1989. One of my specialty areas is working with LGBTQIA+ individuals and I have also been a guest speaker/lecturer on topics related to sexual orientation and gender identity at middle school, high school, and university classrooms in both Ohio and Kentucky. I am writing this testimony in opposition to Ohio HB 8 based on my experiences and knowledge as a psychologist, and as a member of the American Psychological Association and Ohio Psychological Association.

In a press release on March 9, 2022, then American Psychological Association president Frank C. Worrell, Ph.D. condemned the Parental Rights in Education Bill (also known as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill) passed by the Florida legislature and ultimately signed into law by Governor Ron DeSantis later that year. Dr. Worrell called the measure stigmatizing and inherently wrong, noting that psychological research has shown that increased social isolation and stigmatization, likely outcomes of this legislation, can lead to depression, anxiety, self-harm and even suicide.

So it is not surprising that members of the Ohio School Psychologists Association and the Ohio School Counselors Association have both spoken out in opposition to HB 8, a bill similar to Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill. This legislation would add broad curriculum censorship requirements, undermine existing civil rights protections, and create impossible and conflicting rules for teachers and counselors. It would also further marginalize already vulnerable students and add to the overall mental health crisis already burgeoning in the state of Ohio and across the country.

We are in a very challenging time marked by open hatred, violence and increased oppression of a wide variety of marginalized groups and individuals. Please consider carefully the likely impact of attempting to erase LGBTQIA+ individuals from our education system, to create an unprecedented level of censorship in our public school systems, and to make the work lives of our already overburdened teachers and counselors a nightmare of contradictions and impossible expectations. All children and youth enrolled in Ohio public schools should be visible, affirmed and celebrated for the unique individuals that they are and the young adults that we are hoping they grow into, individuals who are treated with dignity and respect, not with censorship and erasure.

Thank you for considering my testimony in your decision making process.

Shirley J. Lange, Ph.D., Psychologist