

**Opponent Testimony for HB8
Ohio Senate Education Committee
12/10/2024**

**Leo Duru, Student
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio Speakers Bureau**

Chair 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 Leo Duru, and my pronouns are he/him. I'm a transgender college student from Zanesville, Ohio, and I'm here to oppose House Bill 8, as it would take away resources and information that students need to safely build their identities.

Your teenage years are the time when you're trying to figure out your identity. At home, I had older parents and a younger sister who couldn't even spell the word "identity" yet, so I didn't have anyone there to look to when I started to feel like I wasn't in the right body. Luckily for me, my school offered resources to help.

Through my school's kind guidance counselor, I found a place where I could talk about my confusion. I love my parents to death, but I knew this wasn't something they would understand or accept yet, so having a safe place to label what I was feeling was a blessing. The teachers at my school humored my awful name change attempts, and eventually, with the help of adults who understood me, I was able to choose when I felt safe enough to come out and became the confident person you see today.

I was lucky, but my story could've looked very different without the safety and knowledge school offered. It breaks my heart to think that, if House Bill 8 passes, that would become the reality for many students who are still trying to find their identities.

My story isn't unique, believe me. As I graduated and came into the real world, I met plenty of folks whose stories matched mine line for line. One of the things I was often told was that school - be it middle school, high school, or even college - was the place they felt they could experiment. In a place of education, everyone's always learning, so where else would someone learn about their gender identity?

I know folks who had their financial support snatched away from their families when they came out, and of folks whose parents hurt them when they came out. By taking away the safety

that school offers in the form of counselors and teachers to talk to, this bill would force trans students to make a terrible choice: hide their truth and live with the mental pain it brings, or risk the backlash of a family who simply may not be ready.

I'll be honest, I never imagined that one day, I'd feel confident enough in my gender identity to stand in front of powerful people and introduce myself with it. I'm sure the other storytellers feel the same, and that's in no small part due to the protections that House Bill 8 aims to take away. I want other folks to be able to feel this way someday.

House Bill 8 would remove resources and information that students need to safely build their identities. I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote no on House Bill 8.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions.