

RE: HB8 “Parents Bill of Rights” or the “unsafe student bill” - *oppositional testimony*

Dear Chair Brenner, Vice Chair, Ranking Member O'Brien, Sen. Ingram, and respected Committee Members:

As a local constituent and citizen, I wish to express my deep concern over the proposed language of HB 8.

HB 8 puts the privacy and well-being of Ohio students at dire risk. It is imperative that trust between young people and a teacher or other school staff member remain intact; for students who do not feel safe at home, sometimes they have nowhere else to turn but to a teacher or guidance counselor.

While we hope that every young person could rely on immediate family members and parents, we unfortunately understand that is not the reality. These generalized parameters cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach for supporting our young people, as for many students – especially LGBTQ+ students – they will do just the opposite.

Additionally, HB 8's vague language regarding “sexuality content” would chill vital conversations about sexual orientation, gender identity, and diversity in family or relationship dynamics. It is also wholly unneeded. Current law in Ohio already has provisions relating to parental notification and review.

Ohio has seen a few “forced outing” bills over the past several years, and they have all failed. Previous bills have required schools to immediately notify parents if a student displays any signs of gender dysphoria or “demonstrates a desire to be treated in a manner opposite of the child's biological sex.” This version defines sex as “biological sex,” which completely erases students with variations in sexual development—intersex students, as well as trans and nonbinary students.

This bill requires a district to report “changes to a student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being,” which sounds like a good thing... but it's simply coded language for requiring districts to out LGBTQ+ students to their family. Under the language of this bill, this is required even if the school knows or has reason to believe that the student's health, safety, and welfare will be put in jeopardy by this disclosure, because of a parent's “political or religious” beliefs are held out to be superior than the student's self-expression and overall wellbeing.

Schools must remain a safe, trusted space for students and educators, regardless of their race, gender identity, or sexual orientation. The overly vague standards in HB8 go against the Whole Child Framework of the Ohio Department of Education, which emphasizes “equity” and the “specific needs of individual students” as one of the core tenets of our strategic plan for education. How are the specific needs of LGBTQ+ students being met here? They aren’t.

Ohio already has regulations that govern parental notice, review, and opting out of instruction. This is a non-issue. Public schools are already required to establish policies that allow parents to be actively involved in their children’s education. Parents can attend school board meetings or read the minutes later from home. Parents can attend PTA meetings. Parents can review the lesson plans and homework at any point during the school year. Parents can attend parent-teacher conferences and request additional meetings as necessary. Parents can communicate directly with their children’s teachers. It has never been easier to be involved.

I ask you to stop the politicalization of gender identity. Every single one of us has a gender identity—even you—you’ve probably just never had to take the time for self-examination. Let kids be kids! That includes giving them the space to explore their own personal identities in their own time.

I urge you to vote **no**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Faye Macrae