

Opponent Testimony for HB 8 – Written-Only
Senate Education Committee
December 10, 2024

Keely E. Pearce (she/her)
Constituent from Lancaster, Ohio
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Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee;

Thank you in advance for considering my testimony. My name is Keely Pearce, and I utilize she/her pronouns. I am a lifelong resident of Lancaster, having only left to attend The College of Wooster, where I graduated Summa Cum Laude, before returning to my hometown. I have resided in Lancaster for over ten years, during which time I have worked for local government, a nonprofit organization, and am currently employed by a local for-profit entity specializing in affordable housing, property management, and construction. My partner and I have established our home here, as my family is located in this area, and I have been actively engaged in the community, striving to effect positive change. I attribute this commitment to my parents, whose experiences have greatly influenced my values—my mother is a trained and licensed social worker specializing in trauma-informed care and foster care/adoption, while my father has served our community as a member of the Lancaster Board of Education. Additionally, I identify as bisexual and have completed my K-12 education entirely within Ohio's public school system. **I am writing to respectfully urge you to oppose House Bill 8, which would jeopardize the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth and impose considerable burdens on Ohio's teaching and counseling professionals.**

While I am opposed to the entire bill, I am particularly alarmed by the unique risks that this legislation presents to youth safety. **LGBTQ+ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide as their peers¹. Furthermore, 26% of homeless LGBTQ youth report being expelled from their homes solely due to their sexual orientation or gender identity².** This data does not account for the potential consequences of legislation such as HB 8, which mandates that school staff must "out"

¹ Johns, M. M., Lowry, R., Haderxhanaj, L. T., et al. (2020). Trends in violence victimization and suicide risk by sexual identity among high school students — Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2015–2019. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 69,(Suppl-1):19–27.

² National Coalition for the Homeless. (2020). *Homelessness among the LGBTQ Community*. <https://nationalhomeless.org/lgbtq-homelessness/>

students to their families, even in situations where abusive circumstances may be present—this is especially distressing given that teachers are mandated reporters. The prevalence of these alarming statistics will likely escalate if HB 8 is permitted to become law in Ohio.

Moreover, Ohio's educators and school counselors will be burdened with the requirement of disclosing student information to their families, thereby eliminating any semblance of privacy regarding the vaguely defined "sexuality content" in their classrooms and offices. This obligation to "out" students, despite the risk of familial abuse, undermines the ethical and legal responsibilities of school staff. Additionally, the ambiguous term "sexuality content" is overly broad and subject to varying interpretations, thereby introducing further administrative hurdles to an already overstressed, underfunded, and undervalued public school system. **The notion that the Great State of Ohio prioritizes censorship over the safety of its youth is not only absurd but also deeply troubling.**

As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I must assert that limiting youth exposure to individuals like myself does not enhance safety for cisgender, heterosexual youth. **In fact, it endangers LGBTQ+ youth by denying them the support and representation they require.** The inevitable outcome of such a policy is an increased risk for LGBTQ+ youth and heightened dangers within the teaching and counseling professions. **I strongly implore you to oppose House Bill 8.**

Thank you for your consideration,
Keely Pearce (she/her)