



Jaime Miracle, Deputy Director
Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 8
Tuesday December 10, 2024

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Education committee, thank you for accepting my written testimony in opposition to House Bill 8 today. My name is Jaime Miracle. I am the Deputy Director for *Abortion Forward*, formerly Pro-Choice Ohio, a statewide organization that champions policy changes and mobilizes activists to protect abortion rights and bodily autonomy. I am submitting this testimony today on behalf of our staff, volunteers, and supporters across the state, to ensure that Ohio's educational system is best set up to support and educate our young people. Education is the cornerstone of our democracy and our nation's success, HB 8 undermines Ohio's educational system and puts our students and teachers at risk.

House Bill 8 is unnecessary, harmful, and dangerous. Using vague and undefined terms like "sexuality" content and putting onerous requirements on districts and teachers this bill is a toxic combination of government overreach and encouraging the targeting of educators across our state.

HB 8 is unnecessary. Ohio law already requires school districts to adopt a policy on parental involvement¹ designed to "build consistent and effective communication" between parents and caregivers and teachers and administrators. Districts are also required² to provide parents with the opportunity to review instructional materials and curricula used by the district, as well as establishing a parental advisory committee. It's interesting that the Republican Party is known for being the party of local control, but when it comes to local control over their schools and what their students learn this legislature is obsessed with controlling every decision the district or teachers are making.

HB 8 is harmful. This legislative session has been one of the least productive. But that hasn't stopped legislators from introducing and passing bill after bill after bill targeting LGBTQ+ youth and their families: blocking parents from being able to get their child the healthcare they know they need to be healthy, encouraging bullies to harass students just trying to go to the bathroom, and now, forcing teachers and school employees to "out" LGBTQ+ students to their parents even if there is a risk that the disclosure could result in abuse of that child. You say you are standing for parent's rights, but that is all a façade. You only care about the rights of parents who are making

¹ ORC 3113.472

² ORC 3313.212

decisions that you agree with. You have done everything in your power to interfere in the decision-making authority of parents with whom you disagree.

HB 8 is dangerous. Using broad, undefined terms instead of providing clear directions about what schools can and cannot do we are opening up educators and districts to unfounded attacks. What exactly is "sexuality" content? The bill now lists items that are not included in the definition but provides no clarity on what is included in the definition. How will an educator know when they have crossed the line? Some have mentioned discussions of LGBTQ+ individuals as being included in this definition, but is it only discussions of gay marriage that is "sexuality" content? Last time I checked, "straight" is also a sexual orientation. Just because it is considered the "default" by society and this legislature doesn't mean it isn't a sexual orientation. Is reading a book about when a man and woman get married ok? If a child being raised by straight parents should be "protected" against "indoctrination" by a teacher who reads a book about a family who have two dads or two moms, should a child being raised by two moms be "protected" against being "indoctrinated" by a teacher reading a book about a family that has a mom and a dad? Does that sound ridiculous? It should because this bill is ridiculous. What happens when a discussion about a topic that could be "sexuality" content is initiated by a student outside of a specific lesson? A student asks a question about how their family looks different than the one in a book, or about a comment that they heard someone else say? If a parent has opted a student out of those kinds of discussions, does she have to kick Tommy out of class before she can answer the student's question? Or tell the student that she can't answer the question, leaving the student with even more questions about why it can't be talked about in school?

Ohio is the only state in this nation that does not have health education standards. In the past, some legislators have tried to move Ohio into line with the rest of the nation, but leadership in the General Assembly has continue to refuse. Ohio is blocking students from education on a whole variety of health education topics because legislators are too scared of sex education to even start a discussion. We have no standards for education about healthy eating in a state that ranks 34th in food access and food insecurity. We have no standards for education around the harms of smoking and vaping in a state where our rates of adults and high school students smoking cigarettes and vaping is above the national average. We need to be supporting our teachers in helping their students live healthy lives, now and throughout their lives. The government should not be passing bills like HB 8 that targets teachers and districts for complaints and investigations.

The Senate changes to HB 8 also include educational content that is not just presented by school officials, but also outside groups "on behalf of" the school. Does that mean when a school allows an outside group to do an afterschool program? Would this include religious release programs like this legislature is trying to force on schools? It is well known that the *Lifewise* program does not release their curriculum to the public, in fact they sued someone who shared the curriculum publicly after gaining access to it via one of their trainings. How can a school be responsible for informing

parents about what is being presented and allowing the parents to opt-out of the instruction if the school has no idea what is being presented?

I have many friends who are teachers or other school-based workers. The questions that arise in classrooms every day range from the mundane, "Ms. Smith, why do cows moo?" to the highly complex issues surrounding family circumstances, child abuse, sexual violence, and so much more. The teachers I know take great pride in the fact that they love and cherish each of the kids they teach. They provide them with warm coats and winter clothing, and they buy extra school supplies with their own money each year for the kids who show up without them. They take seriously their solemn responsibility to provide students with the best learning environment possible. Gagging them and making them risk their jobs and their livelihoods answering a child or teen's question when they come to them at a time of need is not the answer. It will create a culture of fear and retribution instead of the culture of love, support, and knowledge that Ohio's young people need and deserve.

Abortion Forward urges the committee to not hold further hearings on this unnecessary, harmful, and dangerous bill. If it comes for a vote, we urge a NO vote.