

Opponent Written-Only Testimony for HB8
Education Committee
12-9-2024

Russell J Jurecki
Constituent from Lancaster, Ohio
Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee;

Thank you for considering my testimony. My name is Russell Jurecki, and I use he/him/his pronouns. Save for my brief time in PA/NJ for grad school, I am a lifelong resident of Ohio, residing in Lancaster, Ohio for the past 21 years. I am a Financial Advisor with Edward Jones. I am the brother, father, uncle, and friend to many in the LGBTQ+ community, and consider myself an Ally. **The purpose of my writing is to urge you to oppose HB 8 which would further endanger LGBTQ+ youth as well as place additional burdens on the already stretched thin Ohio teaching and counseling professionals.**

I oppose the entire bill, however, my main concern lays with the unique risk this bill poses to youth safety. Suicide attempts among LGBTQ+ teens is more than 4 times higher than with their peers. Sexual orientation and gender identity are often listed as the main reason for homelessness by 26% of LGBTQ+ homeless youth. This data exists without the impact of legislation like HB 8. This bill requires teachers, counselors, and other staff of our schools to OUT students to their parents, putting some of these kids directly in harms way with unaccepting and/or abusive family. These numbers will increase if HB 8 is allowed to become the law in Ohio.

The numbers I stated above reduce dramatically when LGBTQ+ youth have a trusted adult they can confide in who is non-judgmental and accepting. Often times, teachers and school counselors are the only refuge these kids have. Removing the ability for LGBTQ+ youth to confide in trusted adults in their lives, who are currently able to support and affirm them, will have dramatic results. I know this bill is designed to do just that. To give Parents the final say. However, we also know that the numbers of parents who will be accepting and affirming are not nearly sufficient enough. Current homeless and suicidal numbers in LGBTQ+ youth demonstrate that directly. Forced outing of these kids is detrimental to their own health. Please do not take this refuge away from these teens.

Additionally, requiring school staff to remove any illusion to the poorly defined "sexuality content" in their offices and classrooms is ridiculous in that the term is overly broad and subject to considerable interpretation. Schools and teachers may be forced to have a hearing within thirty days for the mere teaching of history, language arts, or mathematics. There are important historical figures, from Harvey Milk to Alan Turing to James Baldwin, whose ideas might be limited from a curriculum simply due to concerns arising from this bill. Further, teachers and counselors are already mandated reporters when it comes to child abuse. However, the requirement that they must out a student to their family risks them subjecting their students to potential abuse, going against their ethical and legal obligations.

As an Ally of the LGBTQ+ community, limiting youth exposure to the existence of LGBTQ+ people and concepts does not in any way provide additional safety to cisgender, heterosexual youth. Instead, it denies that same safety to LGBTQ+ youth. **The only result here is increased danger for LGBTQ+ youth and increased risks and harms to the teaching and counseling professions. I urge you to oppose HB 8.**

Russell J Jurecki (He/Him/His)