

**Opponent Testimony for Ohio HB8
Senate Education Committee
9 December 2024**

Catherine Esperanza

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Catherine Esperanza (she/her) and I am an Ohio citizen opposed to House Bill 8.

Growing up as a gay child in southeast Ohio with limited resources, and having seen the abuse many of my queer peers faced from domestic violence, I know how life-threatening a bill like this can be. Many of my fellow peers within the queer community faced ample threats to their lives for their identities and that danger was sometimes most present in the home. As shown in studies by the National Institutes of Health and the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, LGBTQ+ youth experience higher rates of many childhood traumas including, but not limited to, child abuse at the hand of a parent or caregiver.

So, for many of my LGBTQ+ friends who indeed were at risk for physical harm worked tirelessly to protect themselves from that harm by utilizing confidential supports. These supports, often, came in the form of a caring teacher, guidance counselor, or other school professional. As noted in the 2023 research brief by the Trevor Project, having even one supportive adult at school lowers risk of suicide attempts by 34%.

Forcing those life-saving, confidential supports in the schools to expose queer youth will drastically increase the number of LGBTQ+ children who experience child abuse at home, and will most certainly increase the rate of childhood death by suicide.

I implore you to please consider my testimony and, for the safety of our LGBTQ+ youth, to oppose House Bill 8. Allow young, queer Ohioans the chance to experience the equal protections we are guaranteed by the constitution. Allow LGBTQ+ children to live, abuse free. Keep school a space of learning and belonging – not a threat to life.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.