

**Opponent Testimony for House Bill 8 – Written-Only**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
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**The LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland**

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today in regards to Ohio's House Bill 8, known as the Parents' Bill of Rights, but more aptly titled the Unsafe Students Act.

My name is Elizabeth Katavich, and I use she/her pronouns. I serve as the Lead Advocacy Coordinator with the LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland. At the Center, we work tirelessly to provide a safe and inclusive gathering space for education, advocacy, and community building. I am writing to urge you to oppose HB 8 in its entirety.

The Unsafe Students Act is neither new nor unique. HB 8, along with similar "Don't Say Gay or Trans" legislation in other states, is part of a disturbing trend of efforts aimed at restricting discussions on LGBTQ+ identities and erasing their presence in educational spaces. Across the country, such measures have resulted in significant legal and ethical challenges, as well as harmful consequences for students, educators, and communities.

While HB 8 is framed as a way to reinforce parental values in education, it actually prioritizes perceived parental authority at the expense of children's safety and well-being. Rather than empowering parents, the bill strips students of their autonomy, violating their privacy and denying them the right to decide when, how, and to whom they disclose their identity.

This bill fosters a culture of fear, exclusion, and discrimination. Vulnerable youth will be further isolated and subjected to increased harassment, bullying, and mental health struggles. Research consistently shows that LGBTQ+ youth experience higher rates of depression, suicide, and victimization than their peers. Rather than addressing these disparities, HB 8 deepens them by creating environments where students feel unsafe and unsupported.

Moreover, the vague and broad language, coupled with the high stakes for enforcement, places educators in impossible situations under the mandatory reporting requirements. Teachers and school staff, who often serve as trusted allies for LGBTQ+ youth, will be forced to prioritize unclear parental directives over their professional judgment and the needs of their students. This mandate to disclose sensitive information breaches trust, puts vulnerable students at risk, and undermines student-educator relationships, making schools less safe for everyone.

Even more troubling, HB 8 weaponizes terms like "sexually explicit content" and "gender ideology" to stigmatize LGBTQ+ identities. This reinforces harmful tropes and perpetuates the false narrative that gender identity is a mental illness, all while justifying the censorship of

students and educators. These provisions create a hostile and oppressive climate in Ohio schools.

At the Center, we witness firsthand the life-saving impact of affirming spaces where young people can be their authentic selves. Inclusive school policies and educators who support students' identities lead to improved mental health and academic outcomes. HB 8 not only undermines these efforts—it directly contradicts them, sending a harmful message that LGBTQ+ identities are unwelcome or inappropriate in schools.

Chair Brenner and members of the committee, I urge you to consider the real-life consequences of HB 8. Protecting students means safeguarding their mental health, privacy, and safety—not jeopardizing them in the name of parental rights. Passing this bill will harm not only the students we serve but also the educators, families, and allies who strive to create inclusive and affirming spaces for all youth. It undermines our shared mission to protect and uplift vulnerable students across the state of Ohio.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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