



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

I regret not being with you in person today but thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in opposition to House Bill 8. My name is the Rev. Dr. Ben Huelskamp, and I serve as the Executive Director of LOVEboldly, an Ohio faith-based nonprofit working to create spaces where LGBTQIA+ people can flourish in Christianity. In addition to being a pastor and organizational leader, I was trained as an educator.

House Bill 8, the so called "Parents Bill of Rights," presents this committee and indeed all Ohioans with a difficult question: is there and where is the line between the duty of the state to offer public education and parents to direct the education of their children based on their values and convictions? This question has challenged educators and leaders for nearly as long as there has been education, public, private, or parochial.

Specifically, HB8 would make it law that teachers, administrators, coaches, and school counselors must disclose to parents and guardians if their child has come out as LGBTQIA+ without considering the safety of the child including the safety of the student if their parents are known to be anti-LGBTQIA+. HB8 would further prohibit the teaching of what it calls "sexuality content" including "gender ideology" without notice to the parents or guardians of the student or students involved. Given the absence of a definition of "sexuality content" and "gender ideology" in the bill, one could argue that "teaching" includes the presence of pro-LGBTQIA+ books in a school library or an LGBTQIA+ teacher mentioning their same-gender spouse.

Not only do these actions of HB8 present an undue burden to schools and districts to draft, implement, and enforce new policy, they allow for the ongoing harassment and marginalization of LGBTQIA+ students and faculty, to say nothing about the harm that may be caused to LGBTQIA+ children by parents, guardians, and others.

For these reasons and compelled by the example of Jesus whose law is love, LOVEboldly organizationally and me personally oppose HB8 in the strongest possible terms. We urge the Senate Education Committee to stop the bill from moving to the full Senate.

Respectfully submitted,

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Executive Director
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Creating and developing spaces for LGBTQIA+ people to flourish in Christianity.

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