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**Testimony - HB 8
Ohio Senate Education Committee**

Dear Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. Advocates for Basic Legal Equality ("ABLE") opposes HB 8 because of the real risks of harm to children and inclusive school environments. ABLE is a non-profit regional law firm that provides free legal assistance in civil matters to help individuals and groups living on low incomes in 32 counties in Western Ohio achieve self-reliance, and equal justice and economic opportunity.

As attorneys committed to equal justice and equal opportunity for all, and as attorneys who represent parents of children struggling with various issues in school, ABLE urges you to vote against this bill. HB 8 will put the well-being of Ohio students at risk, as school is the one place where many children can access needed emotional and mental health supports. Trust between young people and school-based support is vital. This bill would put school counseling and mental health providers in a conflict between health care privacy laws and ethics and the bill's mandates to disclose a broad range of confidences to parents. Current law in Ohio already has provisions relating to parental notification and review of education and health records that are appropriate.

While we hope that every young person could rely on immediate family members and parents, we unfortunately understand that is not the reality. Ohio should not impose a one-size-fits-all approach for supporting our young people, as for many students – especially LGBTQ+ students – they will do just the opposite.

Additionally, HB 8's vague language regarding "sexuality content" would discourage vital conversations with adolescents about realities in the world about sexual orientation, gender identity, and with children about diversity in family or relationship dynamics. It is also unneeded. Parents already have rights to examine curriculum and opt out of sensitive instruction.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony, and we urge you to vote against this bill.

Sincerely,

Renee Murphy

Managing Attorney – Meaningful and Appropriate Education Practice Group