

Maggie Dahlstrom

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Senator Brenner, senator o'brien, and members of the committee,

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 8, my name is Maggie Dahlstrom, I am an educator and a trans woman. I want to tell you a story about an Ohio trans teen that experienced the consequences of the policies that you are attempting to codify here. Leelah Alcorn and I were the same age in 2014. She knew she was trans at four years old, and didn't have the language to express it so she held it in. When she did come out to her parents, they told her she was wrong and sent her to religious conversion therapy. Leelah, in spite of this came out as gay at her school and received support from her peers. Her parents', upon discovering this, withdrew her from school and isolated her from her friends. They made her feel as if she would never be enough and her life didn't have value because she was trans. Leelah Didn't have trans role models, and killed herself at 17 because she thought, at that point, she would never be able to live a happy life as a woman. I would like to take a moment to point out that this bill, does not respond to or move to protect cases like leelah's but rather mandates it as the best course of action. This bill requires outing children to their parents even if a teacher believes that such actions could lead to abuse, as is laid out in section three, only allowing school to respond after the abuse has already happened assuming that they will get the chance to do so.

But yeah, this is not a unique story. I also thought a life as a trans woman meant being alone, miserable, and exploited. I also tried to kill myself. Neither Leelah nor myself were raised with access to the types of “sexuality content” described in the bill, or any positive trans media. We weren’t taught by trans teachers or their allies, and yet, we were still trans.

When trans kids, when gay kids, when queer kids, ask school staff to keep their identities private from their family, those kids have a reason for asking. It’s not a scheme of teachers to abuse or manipulate them, it’s a request from students for their own safety. I’ve taught fifth graders, ten year old children, who have to go home and get called a sissy or a faggot by their parents for expressing even gender incongruity. This bill explicitly requires teachers and school staff to out students to their parents knowing all of this. When Students don’t tell their parents about an aspect of themselves, they tend to have a reason. This bill describes a world that does not exist in which teachers and staff are maniacally trying to trick children into transitioning, instead of trying to keep them alive. If a parent is telling their children, explicitly or implicitly, that they are not worthy of love unless they conform to the parents ideology, I will not sit idly by and wait for another child to kill themselves. When Trans activists, trans people, trans allies, accuse these bills of killing children, this is why. We have lived with the fear and shame of being different, of being seen as wrong and we won’t go back. I will not make a child suffer through what I and leelah and countless others had to suffer through. When I enter a classroom with a trans child I am not, nor is anyone else, telling them to keep their name, pronouns, or identity a secret from their parents. I am not trying to convince children to be trans or take them away from their families. This legislative body has made it illegal for trans children to receive any of the care they need, it

has made it illegal for them to use the restroom appropriate to their identity and segregated them from their peers, and you are now seeking to take away their sense of self and their hope. When I work in a classroom, I am providing representation to keep kids alive. I am providing that hope when students come to me who have been made to feel worthless. I am an educator, and if a student comes into class feeling afraid and alone and hating themselves, they have a fundamentally unequal capacity to learn compared to their peers. I see this bill as an insult to teachers throughout the state of Ohio implying that they have anything but their students best interest at heart and I urge you to vote no on this bill.