

Opponent Testimony for HB 8
Senate Education Committee
12/9/2024

Tara McAlea. Member
Honesty for Ohio Education

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 Tara McAlea, she/her.

I am a concerned community member who knows and supports LGBTQIA folks in my community. I am here to oppose HB8.

The Unsafe Students Act creates dishonesty in education.

The proposed language would decrease access to medically accurate sex education, which local schools may be providing to their students. The bill does not require a standard of medical accuracy in the instructional materials used in high schools across the state.

The vague definitions in this bill are a gateway for censorship.

The intentionally vague definition of "sexuality" is a politicized dog whistle targeting gender identity, sexuality, and diverse family dynamics and relationships.

Ohio already has regulations that govern parental notice, review, and opting out of instruction.

Public schools are already required to establish policies that allow parents to be actively involved in their children's education and maintain "consistent and effective" communication between parents and their children's schools. Districts must establish a parental advisory committee or some other strategy to enable parental review of instructional materials and academic curricula.

The "oversight" outlined in this bill could create a culture of intimidating or targeting educators.

This bill foments division and distrust of educators and creates a pipeline for the community to micromanage educators. It is important for students and families to have safe, trusted relationships with educators and leaders.

This could add significant strain and tension in an already strained and tense education system.

Our education system is facing incredible challenges right now: a state-wide teacher shortage, COVID-related learning loss, under-funding, the need for mental health services for students, not to mention the fear & trauma caused by recent gun violence incidents.

The language in the Unsafe Students Act is harmful to LGBTQ+ students.

Requiring a district to report "changes to a student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being" to a parent is code for requiring districts to out LGBTQ+ students to their family. Sharing this deeply personal information without student consent can be traumatizing and dangerous for the student. Schools must remain a safe, trusted space for students and educators. This vague standard goes against the Whole Child Framework of the Department of Education, which emphasizes "equity and [the] specific needs of individual students" as one of the core tenets of our strategic plan for education.

Federal level leaders have roundly rejected this type of legislation.

Legislation similar to the Unsafe Students Act was introduced in Congress, where even conservative legislators disagreed with its intent and scope. The White House has specifically noted that this type of legislation puts LGBTQ+ students at greater risk, politicizes education, and fails to deliver the resources that schools and families need.

I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote no on HB8.

Thank you.

Tara