

Ohio Senate Public Testimony
Senate Education Committee
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Constituent from Dayton, Ohio

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Senate Education Committee: thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today about my opposition to House Bill 8.

Folks, I am here today because, and I'll just say it plainly, I love my mom. I mean it, I would like to put it in the record that I, Jordan Ostrum, love my mom.

You know, we have heard a lot today about data. And the data is clear about the harm that this bill, if passed, would inflict on our fellow Ohioans. But data rarely tells us the whole story. So instead of repeating the same horrifying facts and figures that the experts have already shared with the Committee, I would instead like to share something else, something that no else can share: my story.

I am new to Ohio, but am proud to now call it my home. I grew up in a state somewhat similar to the Buckeye State, in Wyoming. When I was four years old, two men kidnapped a gay college student and beat him mercilessly, tying him to a fence post about an hour from where my toddler-self slept. The man died days later in Fort Collins, Colorado, the city of my birth. His name was Matthew Shepard. His murder was an irreversible act of bigoted violence. It was not the only violence that served as a backdrop to my childhood, however.

The other violence did not come in the form of physical violence. The other violence also certainly did not come from inside the home. As y'all already know, I love my mom. I was reared in a happy home, where I always had a full stomach, a full bookshelf, and, most importantly, a house that was full of loving family members—both human and canine. No, the other violence that was present in my childhood was violence from my own state government.

You see, growing up, I was taught to lie. Not to spread falsehoods, not to deceive people, not to gain advantage over my neighbors. I was taught to lie because if people found out that the woman whom my mom and I lived with was not, in fact, my mom's roommate but rather her life-partner, we were afraid the state would take me away from my mom. As a child, I couldn't get too close to my peers because of this fear that permeated our lives. We were living in the closet and living in fear. We lived that way because we feared that our own state government would tear our family apart.

You see, I've learned in my life that there are different kinds of violence. Different degrees of violence. The murder of Matthew Shepard was an extreme form of violence. An irreparable form of violence. Members of the committee, I have met Judy and Dennis Shepard. I am honored to

have met them, and to learn from them how to fight for justice. But I will never meet their son. He is forever slain in an act of unimaginable violence.

What I would like the committee to reflect on is the violence that they—that you— seek to enact by the passage of this bill. This bill constitutes an act of violence, perhaps all the more insidious because it is not as violent as outright murder. This bill will force our children—our children, our fellow Ohioans—to live a life of fear, secrecy, and dishonesty.

I rise before you today as a proud, queer man who was raised by a compassionate, educated, creative, loving mom who also happens to be a lesbian. I was unlucky to grow up in a time and place where homophobia ran rampant, but I was unbelievably lucky to grow up with a mom whom I knew would support me no matter whom I loved or what my gender was.

Not everyone is so lucky. Many of our fellow Ohioans live in homes where being outed as their true selves would be devastating. They could face emotional or physical abuse, or even displacement and homelessness.

Let me spell it out for you: this bill would create fear for families and would make more homeless kids. This bill would immerse people across the entire Buckeye State and lead to unimaginable violence. But this violence is not irreversible.

The violence is not irreversible because you do not have to pass this bill. It is not too late to say no to hate. We do not have to choose the path of increasingly radical legislative violence against our fellow Ohioans. We can choose instead to embrace love. Members of the committee, please take a moment to think of the people in your life whom you truly love. Now please, consider all of the loved ones who will be hurt by this bill. Vote with your mind, and also your heart, and vote no on House Bill 8.