

**Opponent Testimony for House Bill 8
Senate Education Committee
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Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Education committee,

Thank you for giving me the time to speak here today. My name is Mariana Hawkins, and my pronouns are she/her. I am here today to oppose House Bill 8 in its entirety. I am not an expert on queer identities – all I can do is tell you my own story and hope you'll see that House Bill 8 is part of an ongoing fight to hurt my people. Too many of us are fighting to survive. To my community speaking out here today, thank you for using your power. Your voices are heard.

I grew up in Jackson Center, the type of small farm town where everyone knows each other. I'll ask the Education committee members an uncomfortable question: When was the first time you said the word "gay"? I remember my first time: in 10th grade, as a young human exploring my identity. At school lunch, I told my friends that I was gay. Out of respect for my healing, I will not repeat the deeply homophobic hate I received from my peers and teachers from that moment on. The support and education I should have received were not offered. From then on, I kept my identity secret out of fear of being made an outcast again.

House Bill 8 would require schools and educators to disclose a student's LGBTQ+ identity without their consent, even in cases where the student faces abuse at home. Forty percent of homeless youth are a part of the LGBTQ+ community. We should be actively working to change that number. How many children will be forced out of their home by their own guardians if we allow this bill to pass?

House Bill 8 is a message to my community that we are not welcome. Forty-one percent of our youth who do not receive desperately-needed care consider self harm or even suicide as a way out. How many kids' lives will it take to become a progressive state?

We are asking the state to do the right thing and protect our youth. School should be a place of education. Right now it is a place where children have to survive threats on their lives and their mental health. With House Bill 8, this dire situation becomes worse.

I'm asking you, the elected representatives of Ohio, to take the time to really think if this deeply homophobic bill is going to protect our youth, or is it another bill that tells my community that we are not welcome in our own state? I'm begging my fellow Ohioans, please don't let this bill pass.

I stand here today scars and all, having been a part of the 41% of the LGBTQ+ youth community. Please protect our future generations: consider my testimony and vote no on House Bill 8.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions.