

Opponent Testimony, HB 8

Cristina Christensen, MSW, LSW

My name is Cristina Christensen, and I am a Licensed Social Worker in the state of Ohio. I am testifying today to express my opposition to HB 8, as I believe it could increase risks for youth.

As a parent of a young son, I deeply value my parental rights. However, I also recognize that no parent, no matter how loving or attentive, is equipped to make the healthiest and safest decisions for every situation their child may face. That's why we often say, "it takes a village." Healthcare professionals bring specialized training to support youth and provide evidence-based care in an ever-changing social context. As a mother, I rely on these professionals to help support my child and reduce harm when needed.

Reducing harm often requires creating spaces where youth feel safe and empowered to make choices. A mandate for healthcare professionals to disclose gender-related issues to parents may inadvertently make youth feel unsafe, jeopardizing their willingness to seek help.

I understand that some parents may feel apprehensive about gender-affirming care, perhaps perceiving it as condoning or enabling certain behaviors. However, as a social worker, I want to clarify what truly happens in these sessions. The focus is not on pushing an agenda or making definitive changes. Instead, it involves acknowledging the youth's thoughts and feelings and exploring them in a safe and nonjudgmental environment. Acknowledgment is not enabling; it's validating the young person's right to express themselves without fear. This validation is key to reducing harm, such as the pressure to "come out" before being ready or the suppression of thoughts and feelings due to fear of judgment. Without this safety, youth are less likely to engage in therapeutic processes, which is vital for their long-term well-being.

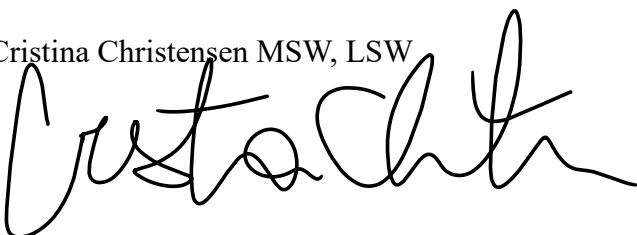
As a mother, I care deeply about my child's well-being. My role as a parent is important, but my child's mental health and safety are even more critical. HB 8 risks undermining this balance by eroding the trust and confidentiality that are foundational to effective care.

I want parents to feel empowered in their child's life, but empowerment includes trusting qualified healthcare providers to prioritize the safety and well-being of our children. Let us work together to create a system that supports both parents and youth without putting vulnerable populations at risk.

In closing, I urge you to consider the potential consequences of HB 8 on the safety and mental health of our youth. As both a parent and a professional, I believe that supporting children requires a partnership between parents and trusted healthcare providers. Let's create a system where every child feels safe, every parent feels supported, and every professional is empowered to provide care that protects and uplifts our most vulnerable.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of my testimony.

Cristina Christensen MSW, LSW

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cristina Christensen', written over the printed name.