

**Opponent Testimony for HB 8**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
**Dec. 10, 2024**

**Dr. Philip Neal Whitman**  
**Reynoldsburg City Schools Board of Education**

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for accepting my written testimony. My name is Neal Whitman, and I am a member of the Reynoldsburg City Schools Board of Education. I am writing in opposition to HB 8, the "Parents' Bill of Rights."

First, let me say that I am sympathetic to the real-world examples offered by some of the proponents of HB 8. I believe that there may be cases in which the pendulum of accepting sexual and gender diversity may have swung a bit too far and be due for a natural correction. For example, as a "cisgender heterosexual male," at times I've thought about my long-lasting lack of interest in typically masculine things, such as sports, guns, and drinking, and my ten-year stretch as a stay-at-home dad while my wife was the primary wage-earner. If I were growing up today, reading that gender identity also involves societally accepted roles and gender-coded behaviors, I wonder: Would I feel a need to identify myself as some kind of non-binary gender? Is the proliferation of gender categories actually doing the opposite of allowing boys, girls, men, and women to feel comfortable in whatever sexual orientations they have, or identities they choose?

However, all that said, I believe that the solutions mandated by this bill are not only a one-size-fits-all approach that disrespects that wishes of local communities, but that they would do much more damage than good.

For specifics on those damages, I quote six out of seven items from Honesty for Ohio Education's list of opposing points regarding HB 8:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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 (ORC 3313.12). Districts must establish a parental advisory committee or some other strategy to enable parental review of instructional materials and academic curricula (ORC 3313.472).

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

Finally, I understand that it is likely that SB 293 on Release Time for Religious Education may also be added to HB 8 as an amendment. Regarding this item, I would like to remind the Committee of my opponent testimony on that bill, submitted prior to its Nov. 12 hearing.

Thank you for your time and consideration.