



The Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and
Gender Expansive Identities of Ohio

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Sandra O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and esteemed members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to House Bill 8. My name is Mariah Payne, and I am submitting written testimony on behalf of the Ohio Counseling Association (OCA). In the OCA, I act as the Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities of Ohio (SAIGEO) President-Elect. I am a licensed professional counselor in North Ridgeville, Ohio, and am incredibly active in my community. My clinical work focuses on LGBTQ+ mental health, making me well-qualified to testify on this topic.

The OCA and SAIGEO oppose House Bill 8 due to the adverse impact it will have on youth, school staff, and school counselors across the state. This bill has the ability to place our LGBTQ+ students at an increased risk by dictating that staff and school counselors must disclose students' identities or orientations. Additionally, House Bill 8 could negatively impact teachers, school counselors, and school staff by overburdening them through the broad notification requirements. House Bill 8 will negatively impact the mental wellbeing of LGBTQ+ youth (The Trevor Project, 2023).

We agree that parents should be informed about their child's grades and wellbeing—this is a fundamental aspect of fostering healthy family relationships. However, teachers and staff are already overworked and stretched thin. Adding these additional notification mandates creates an impossible burden, particularly when school personnel are already required to report concerns related to harassment, suicidal ideation, injury, and trauma. Expecting staff to monitor and notify parents about every change, including those related to identity, goes far beyond the scope of their expertise and capacity, placing undue pressure on already limited resources.

As mental health professionals, we encourage parents to create a safe and affirming environment for their children to discuss their mental health, identities, and orientations. We want parents to be involved in counseling as this is a crucial aspect to counseling services for minors. School counselors are already notifying a student's guardian of safety concerns. Every child is unique and has the inalienable right to disclose their orientations at their own pace. We are opposed to immediate or universal disclosure requirements that do not take into account the nuances of each situation. Forcing trained professionals to immediately disclose this information to students' parents, regardless of the student's readiness, would reduce the amount of safe adults available to these children and threaten the rapport of school counselors.

Evidence suggests students are more likely to disclose their identities to their parents than they are to school staff. According to The Trevor Project, fifty-one percent of youth reported

disclosing their identities to their parents, compared to only forty-three percent of youth informing school staff. This demonstrates that a trusting, collaborative environment—not a mandate—leads to greater family transparency.

Counselor-client relationships are built on trust and a mutual understanding of the client's confidentiality. This is crucial to the efficacy of counseling adolescents (Bray, 2022). School counselors are trained in understanding the limitations of confidentiality and how to navigate disclosure when providing services. It is crucial that students feel safe turning to teachers and school counselors. If passed, House Bill 8 would tell students they should not disclose their mental health difficulties or identities to staff at their school.

This bill won't just make LGBTQ+ youth feel less safe in schools, it will make their schools less safe. Every child should feel safe in Ohio's schools, that is why we urge you not to pass House Bill 8. We are clinical mental health counselors, school counselors, counselor educators, and counselors-in-training. We have the expertise to tell you that this will irreversibly harm the mental and emotional well-being of youth in this state.

Written by Mariah Payne, MA, LPC, SAIGEO Liaison to the OCA Government Relations Committee 2023-2024, and Gene Dockery, MA, LPC, NCC, SAIGEO Liaison to the OCA Government Relations Committee 2022-2023 and SAIGE Public Policy Chairperson

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