



**Proponent Testimony HB 68
Senate Government Oversight
Catholic Conference of Ohio
November 28th, 2023**

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Will Kuehnle, and I am an Associate Director of the Catholic Conference of Ohio. The Catholic Conference is the official voice of the Catholic Church in Ohio on matters of public policy. The Catholic Conference supports House Bill 68, known as the SAFE Act.

The Catholic Conference recognizes the significant distress, pain, and complications caused by gender dysphoria. I wish to emphasize our solidarity with those who suffer from a feeling of alienation from their body, and the compassion, charity, and personal accompaniment that we urge in response. All too often, minors experiencing gender dysphoria are pushed to the margins of their families and communities. We must reject and condemn any denigration of individuals suffering from gender dysphoria.

Personal accompaniment, through dialogue, listening, and empathy, is the way of the gospel, and we believe that this accompaniment must address feelings of dysphoria without resorting to medical interventions that harm a developing body. In the words of Pope Francis, “learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology.” The Catholic Conference supports HB 68 for the same reason that our faith enjoins us to care for the environment. It is not merely judicious but a positive moral duty to build a civilization through our laws that cares for the integrity of human ecologies, starting with the care one learns as a young person to practice for one’s body.

Ethical considerations aside, there are empirical questions that the Catholic Conference wishes to remind this committee of in its consideration of HB 68. For example, the National Board of Health and Welfare in Sweden, the first nation to legalize gender reassignment surgeries, announced last February that the nation would curtail hormone therapy for minors experiencing gender dysphoria, given concerns that these treatments do not satisfactorily address the deeper psychological needs of young people. After reviewing 9,900 entries from 15 scientific databases,

researchers with Sweden's National Board of Health illuminated their national policy reversal by revealing through this systemic review that there were zero randomized trials in nearly 10,000 peer-reviewed publications on the subject of hormone therapy for minors. Certainly, there is an urgent need for effective treatment modalities for gender incongruence. But we urge you to recognize that the medical and scientific community continues to study the causes of gender dysphoria, the risks and benefits of various proposed treatments, and the long-term success of these interventions.

The questions posed by the experience of gender incongruence among young people are serious, and the Catholic Conference does not come to this legislation in ignorance of its gravity. Rather, we bring together our concerns about human ecology with a humility about the empirical claims regarding medical best practices for minors experiencing gender dysphoria. HB 68 acknowledges the call to honor and cherish the world that we receive as a gift when we are born, including our bodies. Further, HB 68 recognizes that Ohio law should treat minors, as it does in other contexts, differently than adults in prohibiting scientifically and medically uncertain interventions. For these reasons, we urge your passage of this legislation.

Additionally, the Catholic Conference of Ohio supports the provisions in this bill from HB 6 related to fairness in sports. Equal treatment between women and men has particular relevance in athletics, where male competition in activities designated for women and girls can be both unfair and, especially in high-contact sports, unsafe. Young people who experience gender identity discordance should have the right to participate in, or try out for, student athletics on the same terms as their peers, in co-educational activities, or where the sexes are separated, in accord with their biological sex.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.