

Opponent Testimony for HB 68
Senate Government Oversight Committee
12/6/2023

James Vacca, SWA, CDCA, Community Financial Counselor at Equitas Health

Chair Roegner, ViceChair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee,

My name is James Vacca, pronouns he/him, and I am a Community Financial Counselor at Equitas Health, one of the largest federally designated community healthcare centers in the state that primarily serves the queer community. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today in opposition to this piece of legislation.

My husband has been a volunteer at Kaleidoscope Youth Center for a few years and through his work I have seen how important it is for youths to receive support and medical care regarding their gender expression and sexuality. The process of forming an adult identity is arduous at the best of times, and when that identity is one in opposition both to the mainstream culture and one's own body it is doubly so. This legislation would strip away the life-saving care that places like Equitas and Kaleidoscope provide to so many of Ohio's young people.

What is more distressing is that this bill repeats the same medically and scientifically inaccurate information from its predecessor, HB 454. As others pointed out at the time, the medical practices prohibited by HB 68 such as puberty blockers, hormone therapy, and supportive talk therapy have all been widely studied regarding use with minors. The standards for medical care regarding minors experiencing distress about their gender stand firmly behind these practices. This legislation stands in willful ignorance of the work of countless researchers and scholars in this field.

This bill highlights the truly terrible fact that rates of suicide and self-harm remain higher among the queer community, and the gender diverse part of that community specifically, than the rest of the population. But this bill ignores the equally terrible fact that those rates are because of the lack of support, medical care, and access to services that the affected community routinely experiences. Bills like this one are the reason that queer youths consider such things, and this bill does nothing to prevent that.

I stand firmly in opposition to this bill and I urge the members of the committee to do the same. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.