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Chairman Roegner, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Ohio Senate Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 68. My name is Mallory Golski, and I use she/her pronouns. I'm the civic engagement and advocacy manager for Kaleidoscope Youth Center, Ohio's largest and longest standing organization serving and supporting LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults, ages 12-24.

There's a lot to unpack in this harmful bill and with less than 5 minutes left to spare, I'm going to cut right to the chase: This bill is discriminatory and will have catastrophic consequences on young peoples' physical and mental health. Here's what some KYC youth have had to say about how it feels to have their right to health care – and, their very existence – up for debate:

“When people talk about trans kids a lot of the time they focus on the trans part and forget that trans kids are also kids. For me specifically, as a trans guy who has been able to be on testosterone, it has helped a lot with not only my confidence but also not quite feeling so hopeless and like I'll never be able to be seen as who I am. It felt freeing... I have felt so much more hope that I might be able to live as myself, in a body that feels like mine. Hope that there might be a time when I don't dread leaving the house because people still see me as a girl. Hope that I might one day be free to be myself, without fear that my access to this healthcare will be stripped away. Hope that I might one day wake up and finally be happy.” – KYC Youth

“My life shouldn't be your decision.” – KYC Youth

“Without a doubt my intrusive thoughts about self harm significantly increased when I had to wait a few more months for testosterone because the doctor wasn't there. I can practically guarantee you that if I had to wait for two more years to get on testosterone, I wouldn't make it.

Basically, do you want to kill kids? Because to me, that seems like what your goal is.” – KYC Youth

“People can identify however they want to. Are you sure you want to identify as the villain?” – KYC Youth

I’ve had the opportunity to meet and get to know countless trans youth, here in Ohio, who have had profoundly life-affirming experiences because of hormones and puberty blockers. If you’ve never been privy to the way a trans femme person holds her head a little higher after her first day on estrogen or been part of the “Oh my gosh!!! Your voice just cracked!! Listen to how deep it sounds!!” celebration after a trans masculine person’s few weeks on testosterone, let me tell you: It’s magical. It’s a gift to witness a person glowing in their own skin and radiating confidence because finally, for once in their life, they wake up in the morning and feel like they can face the day as who they truly are and don’t want to die because they’re forced to live in a body that doesn’t feel like their own.

Trans youth – as with all other people – are the experts in their own identities and experiences. Nobody should be denied the opportunity to live as their truest, most authentic self.

Now, as far as the school sports portion of this bill is concerned: I am a swim coach here in Columbus, and I have coached scores of young swimmers over the last decade here and in Northeast Ohio. For a couple years, I had the chance to coach a transgender female swimmer.

As I witnessed this teenager’s transition – which began socially, when she started going by a different name and pronouns and wearing a girl’s swimsuit instead of a boy’s – and then medically through the use of puberty blockers and estrogen – it was like getting to know a totally different kid. Instead of slouching and crossing her arms over her bare chest in a boy’s swimsuit, she stood more confidently, even striking a pose in her colorful, floral one-piece swimsuits. She started flipping her hair, rather than hiding behind it.

Having a particular body type could lead to some competitive advantages, depending on the sport. But most young athletes – even those who are transgender and aren’t on hormones – aren’t at a point where physiological differences make a big difference in their performance, if any at all. I see this all the time: In swimming, unlike most other sports, athletes of all ages, genders and ability levels are all in the pool at the same time. I can name many instances when I’ve coached cisgender female athletes who are faster than their cisgender male peers of the same age. I can also tell you that I swam some of my fastest times in high school when I got to train alongside my cisgender male teammates, and that I *still* often swim in a lane alongside a cisgender man who is exactly one foot taller than me, and I can still kick his butt in practice.

Assuming that all people who were assigned male at birth will naturally be stronger, faster or

generally more athletic than those assigned female at birth is insulting to all female athletes – cisgender and transgender alike.

Despite having been assigned male at birth, the swimmer I described had similar – if not a little slower – times in most events compared to the cisgender female swimmers her age, even before she started hormones. Nevertheless, it's clear that everyone on the team looks up to her, and for good reason: She is the definition of a brave leader, an authentic role model, and a genuine friend. But, don't just take it from me – here's what one of her cisgender female teammates wrote about her:

“She challenges me to work hard. She deserves to be able to swim because she’s an amazing person. It doesn’t matter what their gender is, what matters is that they are working hard, benefiting themselves and those around them have the opportunity to play a sport and have fun doing so.”

– 14-year-old cisgender female swimmer and teammate of a trans female swimmer

The reality is that there are so few transgender athletes, and even fewer who are competing at the elite levels. Which is fine! Because youth athletics are supposed to be about finding fun ways to move your body, building camaraderie with a team, learning how to win and lose and having the chance to play alongside and against all sorts of people.

But what about when trans athletes *are* at the elite level?

Many proponents of this bill have brought up Lia Thomas' 2022 NCAA Division I championship win in the 500 freestyle. While that incredible victory is well-earned and deserving of celebration, I'd like to point out that Lia – who's transgender – was still about 9 seconds SLOWER than Katie Ledecky – a *cisgender* Olympic gold medalist and world record holder – who has held the NCAA Division I record in the 500 freestyle since 2017.

Even transgender athletes competing at the *elite* levels aren't guaranteed to shatter records.

Transgender women are women, and they deserve the chance to compete at all levels of competition alongside their cisgender female peers.

Please trust young people when they tell us who they are, stop meddling in people's most private health care decisions, and let trans kids have the opportunity to be themselves. Furthermore, there's already a thorough OHSAA policy in place, and transgender girls are not taking away opportunities from cisgender athletes. Please don't take away opportunities from *them*. Vote no on this legislation and any other legislation that would discriminate against transgender Ohioans.

I would welcome any questions at this time.