

December 4, 2023

Dear Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chairman Antani, and Members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written opponent testimony for House Bill 68. As a Licensed Social Worker, I have dedicated myself and my career to supporting the mental health of young LGBTQIA+ people in the State of Ohio. Working as a Behavioral Health and Clinical Services Practitioner at Kaleidoscope Youth Center, I am tasked with providing comprehensive gender-affirming care and community wellness services to our youth. The work we do at Kaleidoscope stands in sharp contrast to the characterization of gender diverse care that has been presented since the introduction of this legislation.

Kaleidoscope Youth Center is the largest and longest-standing organization in Ohio solely dedicated to serving and supporting LGBTQIA+ youth. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, we work to provide a safer place, programming, and leadership opportunities so that youth can be free to explore who they are and empowered to become their confident, truest self. It is a fact that all of Ohio's youth benefit most when caring families, safe communities, and medical experts work together to create safe, inclusive, affirming environments. House Bill 68 provides the opposite of this environment, and only politicizes and demonizes the citizens and young people of our state. This bill and similar legislation intentionally targets and endangers LGBTQIA+ youth, families, and communities. Despite research, data, and the professional recommendations of medical, legal, and education experts, House Bill 68 seeks to ban and restrict life-saving gender-affirming care for Ohio youth.

Empathy and compassion can offer a safe future for Ohio's youth that House Bill 68 seeks to actively destroy. According to a national survey by the Trevor Project, 94% of LGBTQIA+ youth reported that the recent state of politics negatively impacted their mental health. Not only that, the survey showed 42% of LGBTQIA+ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the last year, and 75% reported: "that they had experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity at least once in their lifetime." It is my duty as a Licensed Social Worker to provide you with opponent insight on the impact that this bill will have on the livelihoods of our state's youth.

House Bill 68 actively disregards best practices of the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Counseling Association, the American Osteopathic Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the US Department of Health and Human Services, and many other leading governmental and nongovernmental health organizations. I strongly urge you to vote against this bill, and continue fighting for a state that accepts all of its young people, their families, and their communities. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Celestia Helbrede, MSW, LSW