

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 in opposition to House Bill 68. My name is Lizzie Bjork and I am submitting testimony on behalf of the LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland.

House Bill 68 is a harmful bill that perpetuates discrimination against transgender individuals and nonbinary youth.

A number of world-renowned medical organizations have publicly taken the stance deeming gender-affirming care to be medically necessary. These organizations include: the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Endocrine Society, and the American Psychological Association. This type of medical care is also extremely well-tested. Puberty blockers and hormone replacement therapy (HRT) have both been used in the United States for nearly 100 years. These treatments are completely safe and there is nothing experimental about it, as this bill's title falsely implies.

Denying access to this care can lead to serious harm, including increased rates of depression and suicide. Furthermore, a recent Pew Research study shows a majority of Americans oppose bans on gender-affirming care.

This bill cruelly scapegoats one of Ohio's most vulnerable populations, trans and gender-diverse youth. Because of the discrimination they face, nearly 1-in-5 transgender and nonbinary youth have attempted suicide, according to 2022 data from the Trevor Project. Youth in accepting households and communities, however, are significantly less likely to attempt suicide.

Ohio is a wonderful state, and we should strive to welcome all of our residents, especially our young ones. Yet, this bill sends a strong message that Ohio's trans and nonbinary youth are not welcome here.

The bill also stems from rampant misinformation, and I would like to correct the record on a few things.

First off, banning gender-affirming surgeries for youth is wholly unnecessary, as no major Ohio medical groups provide these surgeries to youth under 18. For youth, gender-affirming care generally involved therapy, puberty blockers (which are completely reversible) and perhaps HRT. Although many trans people know their true gender from an early age, gender-affirming care is a personal and adaptable care set of supports that accommodates evolving gender identities.

Also, requiring parental consent for a therapist to treat or diagnose a gender-related condition is medically negligent and counter to common sense. Fewer than 1-in-3 trans and nonbinary youth found their homes to be affirming. This means that the provision could stop a majority of trans youth from accessing lifesaving mental health care.

To quote the mother of a trans daughter: "It's a child's birthright to be loved and our job to ensure their unbridled happiness. For me, in the end, I chose life. I decided I'd rather have a living daughter than a dead son."

I implore you to vote 'no' on House Bill 68, urge you to support policies that uphold the rights and dignities of transgender individuals, ensure their access to necessary healthcare, and allow them to participate in sports consistent with their gender identity.

Thank you for your consideration,
Lizzie Bjork (she/her)