

LAUREN BLAUVELT HB68 OPPOSITION TESTIMONY

Good morning, Chairman Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and the members of the Government Oversight Committee.

My name is Lauren Blauvelt, Executive Director for Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio. I am here today to stand in strong opposition to HB68 and its detrimental effect on trans youth and their families.

We all deserve to lead lives defined by personal dignity, the ability to present ourselves authentically, and the subsequent joy and pride in our uniqueness and individuality. Every single person deserves the right to bodily autonomy, the ability to make their own health care decisions, and fair and equitable access to high-quality, affordable healthcare. We know that when people are truly seen and cared for, their lives, their families' lives, and their communities are better and healthier. This is precisely why patients, their families, and their health care providers, not politicians, should decide what care is in the best interest of each patient in accordance with best medical practices.

HB68 is just another example of a dangerous and ugly legislative trend that has emerged over the last several years as statehouses around the country continue to target and discriminate against an already vulnerable and marginalized community. Over 700 bills were introduced targeting LGBTQ+ rights in 2023, with 150 of these aimed at access to gender-affirming care. At the height of this legislative session, more than half (50.4%) of all trans youth were living in a state where a gender-affirming care ban had been introduced. And these bills are having a significant and adverse impact.

This bill is nothing more than state-sanctioned bullying and fearmongering that lacks any basis in research or evidence-backed health care practices. It is both out of touch and discriminatory, displaying a fundamental lack of understanding of transgender youth while banning the best medical practices backed by leading medical organizations across the country. The American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, and American Psychiatric Association are just several of the 30+ national medical organizations who have openly opposed these bills and affirmed that gender-affirming care is necessary medical care. And as much as you would strive to believe it, you do not know better than the professionals.

You are elevating petty and cruel culture wars over actual public policy, trolling, demeaning, and humiliating your own constituents to score political points with an extremist minority, and smugly dragging us backward rather than working toward a future in which all citizens thrive. This is not the work of government--this is an utter lack of humanity, empathy, and basic decency. And it belongs nowhere near the halls of power in this state.

You don't have to take my word for it, either. This year, federal and state judges in Arkansas, Florida, Montana, and Indiana have temporarily or permanently blocked similar gender-affirming care bans, deeming them unconstitutional on equal protection grounds, overly broad or vague. Judges have noted that legislatures passing these bills have failed to rely on experts with actual experience in treating trans youth and that these laws cause irreparable harm by depriving youth of medical care they need. This bill is no different and will likely result in costly litigation while our state defends a harmful and unconstitutional law.

Despite the rampant disinformation we've repeatedly heard in these hearings, the overwhelming majority of transgender and nonbinary youth who receive transition-related health care continue to identify as transgender or nonbinary after reaching adulthood. While the proponents of this bill have focused on the testimony of a small minority of out-of-state individuals who have de-transitioned, recent research from a major medical research center with a large sample size shows approximately 98% of youth who accessed gender-affirming care continued to access that care far into adulthood. This reflects the reality that the overwhelming majority of young people who take medications that delay the onset of puberty do not regret their decision to do so and continue to access gender affirming health care as adults. Of the very few people who have de-transitioned, many report having done so because of external pressures such as rejection from family, and discrimination in education or employment.

And finally, these bills are *broadly unpopular*. Public polling on gender-affirming care bans for minors shows the majority of Americans oppose these bans and do not want their politicians spending their time and energy restricting access to health care. A recent poll of more than 20,000 U.S. adults found that only 17% of responders thought politicians should be focused on restricting access to gender-affirming care. This poll also highlighted an important truth—politicians do not understand gender affirming care well enough to be deciding who should and should not have access. At least 72% of responders stated that politicians are not informed enough about gender affirming care for minors to create fair policies. You lack the experience, expertise, or education to create these policies. And the public knows it.

After a long and grueling midterm campaign during which the boogeyman of “parental rights” became a major source of contention and misinformation, we have before us a bill that *actually seeks* to strip parents of their right to seek appropriate medical care for their children. HB68 is just the latest example of extremist ideology in the Ohio legislature undermining majority rule in this state, while simultaneously upholding government control. This is about the right to freedom. This is about the right to bodily autonomy. The idea that so-called “parental rights” are only for a select minority of parents, and not equally reserved for those that love and support their LGBTQ+ kids, is both deeply problematic and incredibly offensive.

Americans do not want this, your constituents do not want this, and medical professionals across this country do not want this. Enacting bills like HB68 will further the already present brain drain in states like Ohio where the legislature continues to focus its time and energy on attacking and demonizing its own constituents. We do not need out-of-state witnesses from anti-LGBTQ+ hate groups, or the few detransitioners that Republican legislatures desperately fly around the country because they're so few and far between, to have an outsized influence on public policy that affects our statewide communities. Trans youth deserve better. Ohioans deserve better. And we will demand better, now and until Ohio lawmakers live up to the standard of making Ohio a state we can all thrive in. The only question that remains is whether you will choose to listen.

Thank you for your time, and I will now take any questions you may have.