

House Bill 68 – Opponent Testimony

To: Senate Government Oversight Committee

From: Ainslee Johnson-Brown, Ohio Policy & Movement Building Director, Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity

Date: December 5, 2023

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 68. My name is Ainslee Johnson-Brown, and I serve as the Ohio Policy and Movement Building Director at the Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity (URGE).

As an organization that provides a political home for young people, URGE advocates for reproductive freedom, reproductive justice, and an Ohio where residents deserve to express gender and sexuality. At URGE, we believe that every person has the right to live a safe and dignified life—including access to comprehensive and affirming healthcare, including gender-affirming care, without facing discrimination or undue barriers.

It is essential to recognize that gender-affirming care is not only a matter of medical necessity but also a human rights issue. Numerous medical and mental health organizations affirm the importance of providing gender-affirming care to transgender youth. In March 2023, the National Library of Medicine published a study that shows a 50-70% decrease in suicide ideation for youth who receive gender-affirming care. In May 2022, the American Medical Association issued a statement specifically asking state legislatures to take note of the significant and immediate improvement to the health and well-being of transgender and non-binary youth that is directly attributed to the receipt of gender-affirming care. Testimony in the House referenced the “explosive increase” in patients receiving gender-affirming care without considering that medical professionals can offer care to a long-suffering population because of advancements in science, not shifts in society. The number of medical students and professionals who study and train to provide gender-affirming care has grown as evidence continues to show its positive impact to the quality of life of transgender and non-binary youth.

Furthermore, this proposed ban raises concerns regarding constitutional principles, particularly the right to equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment. Denying gender-affirming care to transgender individuals could be seen as a form of discrimination based on gender identity. Federal courts have invalidated similar laws passed in Arkansas (Act 626), Georgia (Senate Bill 140), and Indiana (Senate Enrolled Act 480). The Sixth Circuit ruling regarding bans on gender-affirming care for minors in Kentucky and Tennessee is significantly undermined by the arguments made in support of Ohio House Bill 8—sponsored by many of the same legislators that sponsor Ohio House Bill 68. In our contradiction over a parent’s right to make decisions

for their child, HB 68 silences parents who support their transgender children. A contradiction this strong will drive the families of transgender children and the medical professionals that serve them out of Ohio.

I urge the members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee to consider the impact of this proposed ban on the lives of transgender youth and their families and to prioritize inclusivity, respect for diversity, and the protection of constitutional rights. I implore you to reject any legislation that seeks to limit access to gender-affirming care and instead support policies that promote the health and dignity of all Ohioans.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am hopeful that, as elected representatives, you will uphold the values of fairness, equality, and compassion that are fundamental to our democracy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ainslee Johnson-Brown', with a stylized, overlapping flourish.

Ainslee Johnson-Brown
Ohio Policy and Movement Building Director
Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity