

December 5, 2023

Senate Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and esteemed member of the Government Oversight Committee,

Today we stand at an interesting point for the state of Ohio. We have the chance to make history by standing against the proposed piece of legislation called HB 68/HB6. LGBTQ2IA+ individuals. While all of the arguments have been exhausted, and there is little chance that my words alone can change your minds, I therefore am sharing stories. My name is Kara Butlien-Cohen and I stand here before you today to urge everyone on this committee to oppose HB 68/HB 6.

As I have stated before, I am a transgender educator from Dayton, Ohio. As a transgender educator, there are numerous challenges. I was lucky. I had the insurance and access to other resources to help guide me. I had mental health support from my amazing therapist Lorna Douglas. Again, I am lucky. You do not care what I do because I am an adult. I can make my own decisions and face the challenges. But...you know who does not have that same luxury? Children.

As an educator, I have seen children be confident in what they want. I see that passion. Adults use the argument that a brain is not fully developed until the age of 25 or 27 in some cases. It is that faulty logic that says children themselves **CANNOT** make a choice of this magnitude. I tell the committee this is not always the case. I know that if I realized that I was transgender as a child, I would have spoken with my parents. Together, we would have made a plan that works for us.

One of my students Sydney, who is also in the Gay Straight Alliance, told me something. She said, "Let kids and their families make the decisions that are best for them. Isn't this **ONLY** between families and medical providers? Would this piece of legislation go against what the GOP believes in? Why does the government have a say on such matters?" I told her that I was very impressed with her insight.

She went further, "Ms. Butlien-Cohen, I know that high school is hard enough with all of the stress and challenges. It must be even harder as a transgender or nonbinary student," I cannot imagine how I could be calm and mentally stable if I could not have access to gender affirming care."

Another student of mine, River identifies as transgender. She was inspired by my actions to come out. She was lucky that she could have access to gender affirming care. I remember her telling

me, “Ms. Butlien! Ms. Butlien! I get to start t today! I am so happy!!.” From that day on, she was indeed much happier and more successful in class.

One last story happened during my time when I was a teacher at East Clinton. For those of you who not know, is a rural district in Clinton County where the majority of people are not kind to LGBTQ2IA+ people. Charlotte was a transgender student in my physics class. She was out socially, but had trouble getting access to gender affirming care. Each day she would show to my class depressed, anxious, and not in a good place. You see, Charolette was out socially, but kids teased her because of two reasons: 1) She did not have access to gender affirming care because of her parents and 2) The harder she tried to pass as female, the gender identity she knew would make her whole. After she graduated, I heard that she attempted suicide and ran away from her home.

I mentioned that there was a limited number of arguments I can make to change your mind. It is my only hope that these stories change your minds. Again, we are at a crossroads. Which side of history do we want to be on? My name is Kara Butlien-Cohen, and I am urging you to vote no on HB 68/ HB 6.