Opponent Testimony for HB68
Senate Government Oversight Committee
Wednesday, December 6, 2023

Courtney Lee

Chair Kristina Roegner, Vice Chair Niraj Antani, Ranking Member Paula Hicks-Hudson and members of the Government Oversight Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Courtney Lee and I'm a mom of three who works and lives in Central Ohio. I am writing to voice my opposition to House Bill 68.

As I mentioned, I have three amazing kids. Felix is 16, David is 9, and Madeline is 4. Let's address the elephant in the room right away–I'm sure you're all asking which of my kids is trans and with permission I will share that it is Felix. But I'm not here to talk about Felix. I'm here to talk about David. Let me be clear–David is not trans. David is very much the boy he was born, and that boy is autistic and has adhd.

I do not believe in wasting time as my time is precious and limited and I believe yours is too, so to that point, I do not think anything I tell you about trans youth will do anything but waste our time–the bill itself would not exist without a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means to parent a trans child or be a trans person. That's understandable–as the bill itself states, the percentage of trans people (though I would correct that to *out* trans people) is small and you likely do not know any trans youth. But the percentage of autistic youth is considerably higher. The CDC states that roughly 1 in 36 children have been identified with autism spectrum disorder and nearly 1 in 10 with ADHD in the United States, so odds are good that this has some effect on everyone in this room.

When David was nearly 4 it became obvious that we needed to intervene in his development. He struggled in preschool in spite of the many experiences we gave him in a classroom setting. The teachers were patient and everything possible was done to help him thrive. Nothing worked. At the recommendation of his teachers, we had him assessed.

That’s not entirely true. What we actually did was put him on a wait list. It would shock me if anyone in this room is unaware, but the wait lists for children’s psychological evaluations are massive–and this was *before* the pandemic caused a huge surge in mental health crisis. He was finally assessed a year later.

It is easier for me to tell you what didn’t happen in that year than what did happen. My son didn’t learn to write his name. He was unable to adapt to a classroom environment in that time. He was unable to make meaningful friendships, in spite of the fact that his particular set of difficulties related to autism don’t include a desire to be part of a community or make friends–he’s actually very social, and so this in particular was hard to watch. He didn’t learn all his letters–and my husband and I were brutal about drilling him. Most importantly, he didn’t get help. No help was available without that diagnosis, and we were at the end of a very long line of people who also needed help.

It took us a year–before a pandemic and before a bill that would potentially add even more people to an already backed up wait list. And after he finally had a slip of paper with his diagnosis he needed therapy and medication. Except that was *also* on a wait list. A wait list during which we read as much as possible and did as much as we could to help him but when he was born I had a baby, not a PhD in child psychology. During this time it became impossible to tell if he had an intellectual disability or was simply struggling due to the diagnosis–and we wouldn’t learn until later, once he had access to the supports he needed, that he had the same capacity to learn as his general education peers but it was hidden under disability. Disability, I can’t stress enough, we had to wait over a year to start treating properly.

Anyone with young children knows that early intervention is crucial when a child has special needs. That is why it is baffling to me that we would do anything to put more road blocks, more difficulty, and more wait in between children and parents in crisis and intervention. This bill will take children who do not need assessed for ADHD or Autism and dump them in the same pool as a five year old who can't write his own name or make friends.

Do not misunderstand me, I oppose this bill for a multitude of reasons and believe it is misguided at best and outright cruel at its worst, but if you do not care for a moment about my oldest son, please think about the effect this has on my youngest. On parents who are just out in the world with kids who need help that is at a premium right now. On children you know and love. You may never have the luck of loving a trans person, but odds are you already love an autistic person.

I am testifying right now because if this bill is passed it will hurt every member of the special needs parenting community, a community that is already struggling. It will hurt the teachers who have these kids in their classrooms. It will hurt the kids themselves–they do not enjoy struggling! I am asking that even if you do not care about the effect this misguided bill will have on trans youth, that you consider the ripple effects this has on the state–those children will be adults someday, and I don't want to know what making these kids wait for interventions that are most effective when administered early does to their development over time. I am asking you think of us and vote "no."