

Aaron Demlow

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Government Oversight Committee, thank you for this opportunity to voice my opposition to House Bill 68.

My name is Aaron Demlow. I'm 26 years old and a proud transgender man who was born and raised in Ohio. I was a trans kid whose life was saved thanks to the gender-affirming care I received when I was 16. This bill would likely have killed me if I was still 16 right now.

There's plenty of science behind the complexities of sex and gender. For example, the many variations of intersex traits that someone can be born with. I don't claim to know all the "science" behind being trans off the top of my head. It's not my job to know the science. It's not any trans person's job to know, because we shouldn't have to explain our existence. The science has been laid out before you by previous opponent testimony. All I know is that I've felt this way my entire life. No trauma or "comorbidity" made me this way, and "social contagion" didn't make me trans either. I just AM trans.

You have also been provided numerous studies all showing that the rates of self-harm and suicide drastically go down when trans youth are affirmed and accepted for who they are. I am a prime example of this. I'll do my best to summarize my experience.

As a kid, I believed that I was the only one in the world who felt "different" in this way. I didn't know there were others like me, and that was the deepest and most painful loneliness I have ever felt. This belief that we are alone is a common experience for trans people growing up, and I believed it until my teens. No "social contagion" made me trans.

In fact, I tried to "conversion therapy" myself when I was just in elementary school. I was getting the cultural and societal message loud and clear—that gender nonconformity was weird, undesirable, and even evil. Sinful. This made me start to like my true self less and less. I would pray in bed at night and ask God why He would make me this way, and I would ask Him to "make me normal." There were many days I would come home from school and weep. For the next few years into middle school, I did my best to mold myself into what was expected of me.

As puberty set in, I felt even more pressure to conform to expectations, and my dysphoria surrounding my body worsened. I began to unknowingly dissociate a lot, and I became depressed. I restricted my eating and worked out heavily in an attempt to stop my chest from growing. I was in so much pain and discomfort in my own skin that I began to cut myself. It was so bad one night that I thought I might die.

After attending therapy and discovering that other trans people exist, I began to improve immensely. My parents will tell you that it was like "night and day." It didn't happen overnight, but once I came out to my parents and was able to take control of my own body with the care I need, I started to feel more at home in my body, more present, and more confident. I just felt more like myself. Being able to access gender-affirming care gave me the biggest relief I will probably ever experience in my life. I was finally able to feel true happiness again, and I was finally able to see a future for myself that I was excited for. Gender-affirming care was not only lifesaving for me, but life-giving.

If passed, this bill will displace families like mine. If I was still 16, my family would have moved away. However, not all families are able to do something like that. We would have moved out of Ohio, but we would be leaving behind our home. Our family. Our friends. Our jobs. I'm watching families like mine being

displaced in other states in real time. They are fleeing states like Texas because it isn't safe for them to stay. States like California are passing sanctuary laws for trans people fleeing this type of legislation. Bills like HB 68 are extremely dangerous and threaten the mental health, and even the very lives of trans youth. I really cannot stress that point enough, because I'm speaking from personal experience.

You've been given the facts, and you've heard my personal experience growing up as a trans kid who received gender-affirming care. This healthcare saved my life. You know what this bill will do to kids like me if it passes—it will increase mental health crises, displace families, and even cost lives. This is undeniable. I beg you, please protect kids in Ohio like me. They're watching, and they're scared. Please leave them alone and let them live.

Growing up is hard enough as it is. Please don't make it harder for these kids. For the sake of young trans people in Ohio just like me, I beg you: please don't pass this dangerous, discriminatory bill. I urge you to oppose HB 68 to protect our state's youth. Thank you.