



1500 W. Third Ave. #228
Columbus, OH 43212
Phone: (614) 285-4589
mail@ospaonline.org
www.ospaonline.org

Senate Government Oversight Committee
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Written Testimony on HB 68
Jennifer Glenn, M.S., NCSP
Ohio School Psychologists Association, President-Elect

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee name is Jennifer Glenn. I am a Nationally Certified School Psychologist in my 15th year of practice, and I am the President-Elect of the Ohio School Psychologists Association (OSPA). My statements today on HB68 reflect the position of the Executive Board of that Association, and mirror the guidance of the National Association of School Psychologists.

HB68 would put school psychologists, and many other mental health professionals, in a position to choose between following our ethical code of conduct and following the law. The ethical code of school psychologists calls for beneficence, through which we respect the rights and dignity of all persons, and nonmaleficence, which requires that we do no harm (NASP, 2010). School psychologists are ethically obligated to ensure that all youth, including those with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and/or gender expressions, are able to develop and express their personal identities in a school climate that is safe, accepting, and respectful of all persons and free from discrimination, harassment, violence, and abuse (National Association of School Psychologists, 2022). Specifically, our ethical guidelines require school psychologists to promote fairness and justice, help to cultivate safe and welcoming school climates, and work to identify and reform both social and system-level patterns of injustice. This includes the need to “respect the right of persons to choose for themselves whether to disclose their private thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors,” particularly related to sharing their sexual orientation or gender identity. School psychologists can meet with students and their families to help all parties develop mutual understanding; however, protecting the individual student’s safety and wellbeing remains the priority. Unwanted or untimely disclosures could lead to potential harm of the individual, even with positive intent, within the school, home, or community.

In schools, as well as in certain sections of our society, gender diverse youth experience higher levels of victimization, bullying, and discrimination. The CDC found that these experiences are associated with poorer school attendance, lower grade point averages, fewer plans for postsecondary education, lower self-esteem, higher rates of depression, greater substance abuse, and higher risk for suicide (CDC, 2013). These mental health and behavioral health risks can be lessened, however.



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When gender diverse youth develop in more positive school climates which include various supports such as a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA), an LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum, comprehensive anti-bullying policies, and supportive educators, allies, and role models, they report greater feelings of safety and improved educational outcomes (Kosciw, et al., 2016). Gender diverse youth can best reach their full potential when they are accepted, respected, supported and valued as members of the school community. All youth, regardless of their gender identity or gender expression, are entitled to equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from affirming and supportive educational and mental health services. In schools, our behavioral and mental health interventions encourage self-exploration and self-acceptance rather than trying to shift gender identity, gender expression, or sexuality in any specific direction.

Safe and supportive schools benefit all students, staff, and families, but they also have the potential to be lifesaving for gender diverse young people who may otherwise face adversity, harassment, discrimination, neglect, and abuse from peers, primary caregivers, and other adults. School psychologists recognize the benefit in affirming an individual even when it may seem impossible or improbable to change an entire system. School psychologists work alongside our colleagues in social work and other mental and behavioral health professionals to ensure that all youth, including those with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and/or gender expressions, are able to develop and express their personal identities in a school climate that is safe, accepting, and respectful, and one that allows each individual to reach their full potential.

Jennifer L. Glenn, M.S., CAGS, NCSP
Nationally Certified School Psychologist
ODE Credential #21823904
State Board of Psychology License #SP612



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