

Testimony of Alaina Kupec

Opponent of House Bill 68

To the distinguished members of the Senate Oversight and Reform Committee

I am writing to you today to oppose HB68 and to share my reasons for doing so. I am a Navy Veteran, having served as an intelligence officer in a Navy Strike Fighter Squadron, and for the last 27 years I have been in the bio-pharma industry. I am currently an Executive Director in the development organization of my company, and previously I spent 23 years at Pfizer. I am the parent of three adult children and married to a PhD researcher at Google. And least notably, I am a 54-year-old woman who happens to be transgender.

I write to you today in hopes that today's young children do not have to experience the pain and suffering I experienced for the first 43 years of my life. I knew that something was wrong with me when I was 6-7 years old. But that was in the mid-1970s when there was little to no public awareness about gender dysphoria. I lived within a mental prison of knowing something was wrong with me, but having no context or understanding of why I felt the way I did. I couldn't understand why my body was not aligned on the outside with how I always felt on the inside. Going through puberty, I struggled with my body changes, knowing I was not developing physically as I identified internally. I kept my struggles a secret from all those around me, out of shame, fear, and the feeling of being broken.

I went to college in 1987, and the fall of my freshman year I vividly recall going to the library of my R1 research university to try and find out why I felt the way I did. Yet there was nothing there I could find to help me reconcile my brain and body. My parents couldn't afford to pay for my college so I joined Navy ROTC and graduated cum laude and as the Honor Graduate of my commissioning class. I was one of only 33 newly commissioned Naval Intelligence Officers in 1992. I was the Ground Officer of the Year in my squadron and received two Navy Achievement medals for my leadership. During my squadron's 6-month deployment on the USS George Washington aircraft carrier, our battle group was the only resource in the Mediterranean or Persian Gulf when Saddam Hussein amassed his Iraqi troops along the border with Iraq and our nation was on the precipice of returning to war to defend Kuwait. It was me who was selected to go ashore and lead the intelligence efforts of the battle group, working with the CIA, DIA, and other armed forces to prepare plans to defend Kuwait.

It was also around this time that home computers and personal access to the internet became available. And that was when for the first time, I learned that how I felt was not unique, it had a name and others experienced it too. There was some solace in the fact that I was not alone, but at the same time, I had no understanding of what I could do to get treatment. The one thing I did realize was that staying in the Navy would not likely be an option for me. And I knew this because I had a top-secret clearance and would have to pass polygraph tests attesting that there was nothing about me that someone could use to blackmail me. And I also knew this

because in addition to the Intelligence Officer in the squadron, one of my collateral duties was as the Legal Officer in the squadron. In that duty I had to help the commanding officer out-process a sailor for being gay. And while there were no official policies about people who felt like me, I could not see a way forward for me remaining in the Navy.

I saw my first mental health counselor for my gender dysphoria in 1996. But even then, there was not good information for mental health professionals to help me understand my gender dysphoria. And for the next 10 years I focused on suppressing who I was so that I could start a family with the wife I loved and have children with her. But that whole time was still a struggle to reconcile how the world saw me, how I interacted with it, and who I knew myself to be deep down inside. I saw mental health professionals on and off, but kept to myself what I knew was my truth. Because to admit that truth meant risking losing my marriage, my children, my family's love and support, my job and all my friends. Literally everything. Because at that time, no one around me knew what gender dysphoria was and all my fears were also the reality of so many people who felt like me.

But in 2012 I knew I could not live my lie any longer, and the choice I had was whether to live authentically or choose to no longer live. And I loved my then wife and kids too much to leave them alone, and put my trust in God that He knew me all along for what was in my heart and mind, and that in moving forward I would trust Him to give me the strength to get through the challenge of a physical transition. I had found the medical evidence that let me know that how I felt was in fact a medical condition. It came in the form of brain imaging studies done on people with gender dysphoria before they took transition related hormones. Those studies, done in Asia and Europe, showed that people who were transgender had brains that didn't image male or female, but rather very uniquely in-between.

We know today that no one makes the choice to be transgender, to suffer the pain, anguish and stress that comes with gender dysphoria. Despite what some extremists may say, gender dysphoria is a medical condition, recognized as such by every reputable medical association in the country. It is also treatable, with mental health care, counseling, and when appropriate, a physical transition.

My question for all of you is this: Why should we force today's youth into the same mental prison I had to endure almost 50 years ago? I am in no way advocating for a physical transition before the age of consent. What I am advocating for is for the right of the parents of youth who are transgender to make decisions in the best interest of their child, in consultation with their child's doctor. To allow these children access to counseling and puberty blockers until they can get to the age of consent, and then for them to be able to make the decision best for them at that time.

I have worked in bio-pharma for close to 30 years. Puberty blockers do just that, block puberty. They hit the pause button on puberty, thereby sparing these youth from later surgeries that will be REQUIRED in order to reverse the effects of going through puberty in the wrong gender. For those transitioning to male, this would mean mastectomies, and for those to female, tracheal shaving, facial plastic surgeries to reverse the effects of testosterone in brow and facial structure, and then facial hair removal (typically 250 hours of electrolysis, electrocuting every

single hair follicle in the face, for each of the 6 phases of the facial hair cycle). All of these are prevented by access to puberty blockers, while being reversible.

The perception that children are having gender surgeries is misinformed. There are children born with ambiguous genitalia, and in some cases there may be medically appropriate surgeries, but those are extremely rare. And if for some reason there are procedures not being done in alignment with medical standards of care, the State Medical Society has a process in place to address medical malfeasance. What is not needed are laws that would deny care to the almost 97% of transgender youth.

I became visible in the fight for transgender equality when I lived in my native North Carolina and the now famous HB2 bathroom bill was introduced. And the SOLE reason I chose to be visible is because I never wanted today's youth to have to suffer in silence like I did for so long. We now have gender clinics at most of the top academic medical centers in this country. We have medical professionals trained and ready to treat these young people, so they don't have to endure the pain and suffering, anxiety depression and thoughts of suicide. And we should leave it to the parents, their children and these doctors to make the decisions best for them.

You all have incredibly hard decisions to make as lawmakers. How do you make the Great State of Ohio prosperous for ALL your citizens, not just the vocal extreme minority who seek to further their own agenda? This is not a partisan issue. I am not a liberal democrat. I was a lifelong Republican and now Independent. I hope that you will find ways to focus on the facts, the medical evidence, the medical experts, and preserve the ability for parents to make decisions on what is best for their children.

Thank you,

Alaina Kupec