

Opponent Testimony for House Bill Number 68
Government Oversight Committee
December 6th 2023

Members of the Government Oversight Committee,

As a dedicated early childhood educator with over a decade of experience I am deeply committed to protecting the well-being and safety of Ohio's children. That is why today I am writing to you to express my profound unease regarding house bill 68. This bill seriously threatens the mental, emotional, and physical well-being and health of Ohio's transgender and gender diverse youth. Not only that, this bill strips these children and individuals of their very dignity for simply pursuing their basic rights of attending public schools, joining peer groups and teams, and seeking physical and mental health services.

My years in early childhood education have taught me the importance of creating nurturing, inclusive environments where every child feels valued, respected, and safe. However, house bill 68's restrictive provisions regarding access to gender-affirming care for minors, and its suggestion to ban transgender and gender diverse children and individuals from participating on athletic teams aligned with their gender identity completely contradicts our state's supposed commitment to inclusion and to create supportive environments for all children within our state. Children thrive in an environment of love, support, stability, and safety and our state should be dedicated to ensuring every child is able to thrive and bills like house bill 68 and house bill 183 absolutely fail to uphold us to the standards we know we should be implementing.

House bill 68 is a concerning invasion into the privacy of these children as well as their families as it drastically jeopardizes the autonomy of individuals and families and removes trust in them to make informed decisions about their own healthcare services and needs, and the needs of their children. This bill is an intrusive slippery slope of the government into the patient and doctor relationship. The discussed prohibition on mental health professionals from diagnosing or treating minors with gender-related conditions without parental consent could hinder timely and necessary interventions for these vulnerable individuals. Working in my field has sadly made me all too aware that not every child is safe within their own homes, and our states must do more to protect these vulnerable children. A ban for all gender affirming care for families who rely on medicaid is also hardly inclusive for low income families and children. It is crucial to understand that gender diversity is a legitimate aspect of human identity, and denying appropriate care and support can have lifelong and even deadly consequences for these children and individuals.

My experience as an educator has shown me the importance of fostering an environment where all children feel accepted and supported. I believe schools should serve as a second home for children, as many are not fortunate enough to have a secure or nurturing first home. I urge you to reconsider and reject house bill 68 as this bill goes against the very core principles of inclusivity, respect, and equity that should define our educational system. I am grateful to you for listening to my concerns and I plead with you to vote no on house bill 68 today. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Siarra Powers
Early Childhood Educator