



Safe Children, Stable Families, Supportive Communities

Senate Government Oversight Committee
Opponent Testimony HB68
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Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Committee, this written opponent testimony for HB68, *Enact the Saving Adolescents from Experimentation and Save Women's Sports Act*, is submitted on behalf of the members of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). PCSAO is a membership-driven association of Ohio's county public children services agencies (PCSAs) that advocates for sound public policy, promotes program excellence, and builds public value for safe children, stable families, and supportive communities.

PCSAO's member-led Legislative Committee and Board of Trustees review legislation for possible impact on children and families served by the children services system and on county public children services agencies. It is through that lens that we reviewed HB68 and concluded that we must oppose this bill due to its provisions regarding the SAFE Act.

Research confirms that LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning) youth are over-represented in the foster care system. About 30 percent of youth in foster care identify as LGBTQ and 5 percent as transgender, in comparison to 11 percent and 1 percent of youth not in foster care.ⁱ Furthermore, LGBTQ youth of color are not only over-represented in the child welfare system, but they also stay longer in foster care and have an increased risk of experiencing discrimination and violence compared to their peers.ⁱⁱ

LGBTQ youth enter the foster care system for many of the same reasons as non-LGBTQ youth in care, including abuse, neglect, and parental substance abuse. Unfortunately, many LGBTQ youth have the added trauma that comes with being rejected or mistreated because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Those facing the most extreme levels of family rejection and maltreatment—including violenceⁱⁱⁱ--are often forced out of their homes, or run away, becoming homeless or entering the foster care system.

This trauma takes its toll. LGBTQ youth are twice as likely to attempt suicide than their non-LGBTQ peers.^{iv} However, LGBTQ youth who found their school to be LGBTQ-affirming reported lower rates of attempting suicide.^v The bill prohibits a mental health professional (as defined in 3129.01 (I)) from diagnosing or treating a minor for a gender-related condition without first obtaining consent from each custodial parent (3129.03). This prohibition will reduce access to mental health treatment and hinder the ability of trusted adults to engage when approached by LGBTQ youth.

As front-line workers, PCSAs see every day the struggles that Ohio's vulnerable youth, including LGBTQ youth, face. The threat of family rejection and maltreatment are real for too many youth. Health care and mental health care that is evidence-based and meets approved clinical guidelines must remain available for LGBTQ youth and their families. Limiting care for vulnerable youth, including those in foster care, will impact their ability to heal.

For these reasons, we urge the Committee to oppose HB68. Please contact me if you have questions about this testimony. Thank you.

ⁱ Baams, L., Wilson, B. D., & Russell, S. T. (2019). LGBTQ youth in unstable housing and foster care. *Pediatrics*, 143(3), e20174211. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-4211>; Matarese, M., Greeno, E., Weeks, A., Hammond, P. (2021). *The Cuyahoga youth count: A report on LGBTQ+ youth's experience in foster care*. Baltimore, MD: The Institute for Innovation & Implementation, University of Maryland School of Social Work. <https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/our-work/national/lgbtq/cuyahoga-youth-count/>; and Sandfort, T. (2020). Experiences and well-being of sexual and gender diverse youth in foster care in New York City: Disproportionality and disparities. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/about/2020/WellBeingStudyLGBTQ.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Conron, K. J., & Goldberg, S. K. (2020, July). *Adult LGBT population in the United States*. The Williams Institute. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBTAdult-US-Pop-Jul-2020.pdf>; Kastanis, A. A., Wilson B. D. (2015). *Sexual and Gender Minority Disproportionality and Disparities in Child Welfare: A Population-based study*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740915300463>

ⁱⁱⁱ 30% of LGBTQ youth in the foster care system report physical violence by family members after disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity. Vermont Juvenile Court Improvement Program. (2017). *LGBTQ youth in foster care*. https://www.vermontjudiciary.org/sites/default/files/documents/LGBTQ_InfoBulletin.pdf

^{iv} The Trevor Project. (2022). *2022 national survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health*. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/>

^v Ibid.