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Representative Lipps
Chair Ohio House Public Health Policy Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chair Lipps, Vice-Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Public Health Policy Committee, thank you for your time and providing the opportunity to hear our testimony.

My name is Erin Diffenderfer and I am a resident of Haverhill Massachusetts. I am sure you find yourselves wondering what business someone from Massachusetts has addressing House Bill 68. I am formally a resident of Ohio and am currently a teacher in a PreK-8 school. I have been teaching for 14 years and received my degree in Special Education and Elementary Education from Loyola University of Chicago. Though transplanted to the east coast, I speak to you with the heart of a fellow midwesterner.

Every single major medical organization, including the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), the [American Medical Association](#) and the [American Psychiatric Association](#), supports the provision of age-appropriate, gender-affirming care for transgender and non-binary people. These organizations represent millions of doctors, researchers and mental health professionals in the United States. Gender-affirming care has always existed and isn't a new phenomenon. Does this committee truly feel it knows better than millions of doctors? Or are your motives perhaps motivated by something other than giving the children of Ohio the very best chance in life?

Many of you proudly proclaim yourselves to be "pro-life", where then, is the support and energy for the lives of children currently living, and who would be hurt by the legislation in House Bill 68? "it is well documented that transgender nonbinary adolescents and young adults experience anxiety and depression, as well as suicidal ideation, at a much higher rate than their cisgender peers. According to The Trevor Project's 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, 54 percent of young people who identified as transgender or nonbinary reported having seriously considered suicide in the last year, and 29 percent have made an attempt to end their lives. **In contrast**, numerous research studies have found that **gender-affirming care leads to improved mental health** among transgender and nonbinary youth."

(<https://www.columbiapsychiatry.org/news/gender-affirming-care-saves-lives>) House Bill 68 not

only threatens the privacy of transgender and non-binary youth, but also their ability to seek gender-affirming care, in turn putting youth at risk for increased mental health risks.

HB 68 infiltrates a family's right to make important medical decisions that should only involve their medical providers – not the government.

Individuals, regardless of their age or gender, should have the right to show up as their full, authentic selves, especially in the presence of their healthcare providers. HB 68 would severely damage the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth, while also jeopardizing the trust between providers and patients, putting physicians' medical practices at risk.

Additionally, rather than supporting transgender and gender non-conforming Ohioans, this bill only isolates them further by unnecessarily banning transgender women and girls from participating in sports teams that match their gender identity. Participation in team sports is a common way for children and young adults to build community, and LGBTQ Ohioans have every right to join in these activities. In May 2016, at the request of educators and school administrators, the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice issued landmark guidance clarifying the rights that hundreds of thousands of transgender students have under Title IX — and schools obligations to respect them. Though this guidance was withdrawn by the Trump administration, The Department of Education's guidance didn't "create" new rights for transgender students; rather, it clarified transgender students' rights under Title IX, an existing federal civil rights law. Although the 2016 guidance has been withdrawn, the law hasn't changed. **Transgender students are still protected by Title IX, which ensures that they have the right to equal access to educational opportunities, including access to single-sex spaces and activities consistent with their gender identity. (knowyourix.org)**

I will leave you with one final thought. That of the general population of Ohio. It is a fact that the population of the state is aging and dwindling. "The vast majority of the state of Ohio is growing older, losing population, and losing workers— a trend offset only by growth happening mostly in Columbus and surrounding areas, a new report shows. The state as a whole — and cities and metros outside central Ohio — experienced significant decreases in people under age 54, the study added, using data from the 2020 U.S. Census."

[\(https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2022/11/02/ohio-is-largely-losing-population-and-growing-older-except-in-the-greater-columbus-area-study-shows/\)](https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2022/11/02/ohio-is-largely-losing-population-and-growing-older-except-in-the-greater-columbus-area-study-shows/). I worry that this bill will only increase the trends as families and younger people move away to protect themselves or their family members. I wonder what will happen after this bill passes. Will Ohio be able to grow and move forward? I wonder if the larger impact of this bill passing has truly been considered.

I ask that you vote no on HB 68 to help protect mental health care for youth, and to protect the legacy of our great state.