



Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the Ohio House Health Committee:

My name is the Rev. Dr. Ben Huelskamp, and I serve as Executive Director of LOVEboldly, an Ohio faith-based nonprofit organization dedicated to creating spaces where LGBTQIA+ people can flourish in Christianity and beyond. I also serve as Pastor of Blue Ocean Faith Columbus, a progressive Christian congregation in Columbus. I submit this testimony in strong opposition to House Bill 172.

As a person of faith and as someone who has dedicated my life to education and advocacy, I am deeply troubled by this legislation. While HB172 is framed as a parental rights bill, its practical effect would be to deny vulnerable children access to mental health care precisely when they need it most. This is why opponents have begun calling it the “Child Abuser Protection Act,” because it would functionally protect abusive parents by preventing their children from seeking help.

The Core Problem: Eliminating Minor Consent for Mental Health Services

The most alarming provision of HB172 is that it removes the ability of a minor to consent to their own mental health services. Currently, Ohio law recognizes that there are circumstances where minors need to be able to access mental health care without parental consent. This bill would eliminate that protection entirely.

The practical impact cannot be overstated. Children experiencing abuse, neglect, or trauma at home would be required to obtain permission from the very adults who may be causing that harm before they could speak to a mental health professional. A teenager struggling with suicidal ideation due to parental rejection would need to ask those same rejecting parents for permission to see a counselor. A young person questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity in a hostile home environment would have no confidential avenue to process those feelings with a trained professional.

HB172 creates an impossible situation for our most vulnerable young people. Many children in crisis cannot safely disclose to their parents what they’re experiencing. Requiring parental consent doesn’t strengthen families, it silences children and leaves them without recourse.

Real-World Consequences for LGBTQIA+ Youth

I want to speak specifically about the impact this bill would have on LGBTQIA+ young people, as this is a community I serve directly through my ministry. The statistics are sobering, LGBTQIA+ youth contemplate suicide at almost three times the rate of heterosexual youth. LGBTQIA+ youth who come from families who reject them are 8.4 times more likely to attempt suicide than LGBTQIA+ peers who reported no or low levels of family rejection.

Creating and developing spaces where LGBTQIA+ people can flourish in Christianity.

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Access to supportive mental health care is literally lifesaving for these young people. Many LGBTQIA+ youth live in homes where they cannot safely come out to their parents. Some face religious condemnation, some face the threat of conversion therapy, and some face the very real possibility of being kicked out of their homes. These are not hypothetical scenarios, they happen in Ohio, in our communities, every day.

Under HB172, a Queer teenager in a conservative household would be unable to access counseling to process their identity without risking parental knowledge and potential rejection. A Transgender youth experiencing gender dysphoria would be barred from speaking to a mental health professional without parental consent, even though those conversations might lead to greater flourishing.

This bill doesn't protect children. It isolates them. It tells vulnerable young people that the State of Ohio has closed the door on one of their few remaining lifelines to safety and support.

Betraying Our Moral Obligation to Children

As a Christian pastor, I can't ignore what Scripture teaches us about our responsibility to children. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them" (Matthew 19:14). He also warned, "If anyone causes one of these little ones to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

HB172 places obstacles before children. It hinders them from accessing care. It creates barriers between vulnerable young people and the help they desperately need. This is not consistent with a faith tradition that calls us to protect the vulnerable, to welcome the outcast, and to ensure that the least among us are cared for.

I recognize that some supporters of this bill believe they are protecting parental rights and family integrity. I understand the desire to be involved in our children's lives and decisions. But we must grapple with the reality that not all homes are safe. Not all parents act in their children's best interests. Some children need access to confidential mental health care in order to survive their childhoods.

Conclusion: A Call to Reject HB172

I urge you to reject House Bill 172. This legislation, despite its stated intentions, would cause tremendous harm to Ohio's most vulnerable children. It would eliminate crucial mental health protections for minors and would endanger already marginalized youth, including LGBTQIA+ youth.

Perhaps worst of all, it would empower abusive parents while silencing abused children.

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Our moral obligation is clear: we must ensure that every child in Ohio has access to the mental health care they need, when they need it, regardless of their home situation. HB172 fails that test entirely.

I respectfully urge you to vote no on House Bill 172 and not send the bill to full House.

Thank you for your consideration.

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