

Lauren Williams  
Written-Only Testimony on H.B. 96  
May 28, 2025 (for May 30, 2025 Finance Committee Hearing)

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written-only opponent testimony on H.B. 96. I am sorry I cannot be present in-person to be able to dialogue with you.

I am a resident of Ohio Senate District 7. I grew up in Ohio, and recently moved back to be closer to family. Unfortunately, I do not recognize this state as the place I grew up in, and it makes me deeply distressed to see what all of us and our children will have to confront if this bill passes.

I oppose H.B. 96 in part because it will directly impact me, as someone who enjoys our public parks and trails, directly benefitted from libraries growing up, and is part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

I also oppose H.B. 96 because it has buried, in a 5000-plus page document the following (as examples):

- substantial changes to Ohio's government and to the authority of municipalities;
- controversial language such as the definition of biological sex and gender identity;
- removing Ohioans from having a direct say on state boards or in who serves in certain positions;
- burdening libraries with new requirements; and
- changing the long-running, Republican-approved library funding mechanism.

H.B. 96 makes sweeping changes to Ohio law having nothing to do with appropriations. In the process, the bill fails to address many pressing appropriations issues, including the state's vicious property-tax/school and library funding cycle.<sup>1</sup> And, while claiming fiscal responsibility, cutting services, and asking everyone to do more with less, H.B. 96 throws \$600 *million* dollars at the Browns' stadium proposal, which neither needs taxpayer support nor is a wise investment of tax dollars.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The cycle is: state funding for schools, libraries, zoos, and other public institutions drops/stays the same; these institutions must pass levies to fund operations; approved levies increase property taxes, as do reassessments; property taxes become too burdensome for many and property tax relief discussions begin – all without addressing the underlying problem, which is: the state's consistent funding failures.

<sup>2</sup> The Legislative Service Commission's analysis of key problems with the stadium proposal, and H.B. 96's funding of it, is available here: [https://mcusercontent.com/83058efadac7fd9d118aa89ee/files/a539d967-357e-c8a1-3e67-77ad3c70ecac/LSC\\_Stadium\\_Analysis\\_Redacted.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/83058efadac7fd9d118aa89ee/files/a539d967-357e-c8a1-3e67-77ad3c70ecac/LSC_Stadium_Analysis_Redacted.pdf)

Ohioans deserve to know what is being considered by their state legislators. This bill is at least five times longer than Obamacare. Ohioans should not have to accept passage of this bill to find out what is in it. Nor should they have to wait to know how much they are losing financially and personally because they will foot the bill for all that is crammed in H.B. 96.

My written testimony will address only some of my concerns with H.B. 96, but I respectfully implore the Committee to press “pause” on this entire process, remove all non-appropriations provisions, and address H.B. 96’s profound fiscal irresponsibility.

### **H.B. 96 Centralizes Authority in Select State and County Officials, and Removes Power from Communities and Voters**

I will highlight only three examples here. However, the result of these changes, is that the Governor and a select group of elected officials such as the Secretary of State, will gain tremendous authority and control over matters previously trusted to decentralized boards and commissions, and to voters. This result further increases the politicization of elections, what is taught in schools, and who serves as our Auditor General, as whatever party in power can dictate far more major, impactful policy changes without having to answer to Ohioans.

One example is the elimination of the Ohio Elections Commission. The Commission’s recent testimony to this Committee also demonstrates no fiscal advantage to H.B. 96’s proposal – rather, the fiscal burden is moved diffusely across the state without additional money for that burden. Another example is changing the Auditor General to an appointed position, instead of an elected one. Ohioans need a fiscal watchdog who is beholden to them, directly, instead of other state officials.

The last example is the elimination of *all* elected members of the Ohio Board of Education. My grandfather proudly served for over a decade as a local elected member of the Board of Education, elected from the Beavercreek/Greene County area. Removing *all* local say in what our schools teach and how they help young Ohioans learn and grow speaks both to a potential distrust in local communities, and a desire to ease the way for controversial policies – by either party – that otherwise would not be supported by Ohioans. It also elbows out voices that would object to financially-unsound decisions made by those who spend most of their time in state government buildings, and not in their local communities.

### **Elimination of Eminent Domain Authority for Non-Motorized Trails**

I echo the concerns from municipalities and others about the exclusion of non-motorized trail development from being a “public use”. I live less than a five-minute drive from the Little Miami trail. Trails are not just for recreation either – they help connect those without vehicles to necessary services. Such development is clearly a

public use. These pathways connect communities and support local businesses – all of which helps boost economic activity. What reason is there to take that away? If abuse of eminent domain is a concern, reform Ohio’s eminent domain law – not do this.

### **Public Library Changes, Lack of Funding, and New Burdensome Requirements**

I benefitted from having grown up where I could visit three different libraries once I could drive. I repeatedly volunteered in the summer at my local library. The public libraries near me and the books each had served as a refuge for me, who was thirsty to learn about science, environmental issues, astronomy, and good fantasy fiction to escape the world.

H.B. 96 undoes so much of that good.

First, I echo comments that the Library Fund should remain as it presently stands under Ohio law. Removing the automatic funding mechanism politicizes library funding more than it already is. I also echo comments that the percentage of funds should be increased. Libraries either must turn to property taxes, or the state needs to step up and increase substantially the funding percentage. The Library Fund percentage used to be in the 5-6% range.<sup>3</sup>

Second, H.B. 96 potentially politicizes library boards of trustees by shortening the years served by each member. There is no fiscal or other basis for this.

Third, H.B. 96 forces on libraries new, vague, and unfunded mandates at the same time as threatening the security of library funding. The proposed requirement that libraries place all material “related” to sexual orientation and gender identity out of the public view of minors is so broad that, as one commenter noted, the entire library could be off-limits. All of the following are mere examples of what could fall under H.B. 96’s language:

- A board book with a married mom and dad (heterosexual-appearing couple) depicted
- A book with a teenage romance between a boy and a girl (same issue)
- An educational book on world religions that discusses how other faith traditions conceive of human gender, biological sex, and/or sexual orientation
- An encyclopedia that includes reference to a culture or tribe that does or did have more expansive views on human gender identity than this bill
- A country factual reference book on Belgium noting that it legalized same-sex marriage in 2003
- Books on human sexuality and puberty geared toward teens

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<sup>3</sup> Ohio Library Council, “History of State Funding for Ohio’s Public Libraries,” pp.2-3, <https://www.ohio.org/assets/pdf/History+of+Funding+01.01.25/>

- A fiction novel that includes someone getting their first period or undergoing puberty and struggling with body changes (without mention of gender dysphoria)
- Basic high school anatomy textbooks or similar items
- The entire periodicals section
- All research databases

H.B. 96 appears to assume there is some “default” or “correct” sexual orientation or gender identity. That is incorrect. Still, if H.B. 96 intends to make that pronouncement, it should say so, and it should provide the funding to libraries to implement such a monumental task. Ultimately, what H.B. 96 asks of libraries is to close off an important place – like I had – for kids to learn, study, and explore the world.

### **Biological Sex and Gender Identity Definition**

H.B. 96’s definition of “sex” is not based in science, but in one type of worldview. It also has absolutely nothing to do with appropriations, and should not even be in this bill. H.B. 96 erases the approximately 2% of the population that are intersex and thus are neither biologically male or female.<sup>4</sup> Being intersex is different than gender identity. Intersex people may have chromosomes and outer appearances (from birth) that do not match. They may also have other hormone related congenital conditions that again make them neither biologically male or female.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, Judaism, in the Talmud, has recognized this for far longer than the Western world.

As for gender identity, as an LGBTQIA+ person, I ask - why is the legislature so concerned with how people choose to define themselves? Freedom includes individual ability to be oneself. I still do not fully understand myself and I am approaching the age at which some people start to have mid-life crises. This is my business, and not that of the Ohio legislature. I also echo those commenters expressing their opposition because of the hate it represents.

Lastly, these provisions interfere with the religious freedom of those faiths that do not adhere to these categories, potentially exposing the state to litigation that it must defend with taxpayer money.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony today.

Respectfully,  
Lauren Williams

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<sup>4</sup> <https://isna.org/faq/frequency/>

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