

Testimony Against Ohio House Bill 96

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I come before you today with deep concern regarding Ohio House Bill 96. While this bill purports to be a routine budgetary measure, it deceptively contains a slew of provisions that would fundamentally alter the legal landscape of Ohio. Specifically, it includes sweeping changes to how LGBTQ individuals are treated, alongside unnecessary demonization of those seeking abortion or post-miscarriage care. These are not fiscal issues—these are legal and social issues that deserve robust debate and thoughtful consideration, not backdoor passage through a budget bill.

Ohio is a state that prides itself on its pro-business environment, its stable legal framework, and its respect for individual freedoms. However, HB 96 has the potential to undermine these values in several ways:

1. The Dangers of Disguising Legal Changes as Budgetary Provisions

Legislative procedure exists for a reason: to ensure that significant legal changes are given proper scrutiny and public debate. By embedding radical policy changes into a budget bill, HB 96 bypasses the necessary legislative process. We cannot allow complex and controversial issues like abortion rights and the treatment of LGBTQ individuals to be decided without the full transparency and public discussion they deserve. This is not how democracy is supposed to function.

2. The Economic Impact: Driving Businesses and Tourism Away

Ohio has long prided itself on being a business-friendly state—a place where both companies and tourists can thrive. However, these provisions would send a signal to the world that Ohio is a state where individual rights, including the rights of LGBTQ individuals, are restricted. This could create a chilling effect on businesses considering Ohio as a place to expand, particularly in industries like tech, healthcare, and the arts, which prioritize inclusivity and equal rights.

Major employers, many of whom have voiced their support for pro-LGBTQ+ policies, will think twice before setting up shop in a state that enacts laws like HB 96. This is not just a political issue; it is an economic one. The impact will be felt across all sectors of the economy—resulting in fewer jobs, reduced investment, and ultimately, less economic growth for the state of Ohio.

3. The Restriction of Rights for LGBTQ People

HB 96 would make Ohio one of the most restrictive states for trans rights in the country, second only to states like Florida. This would send a message to the rest of the nation that Ohio does not value its LGBTQ population. Further, it would leave many of our citizens vulnerable—particularly trans individuals—who are already marginalized in society. This bill

doesn't just restrict access to necessary medical care, but it also further alienates and harms a group of Ohioans who contribute to our communities, economy, and culture.

We should be promoting policies that create unity, respect individual freedoms, and protect the most vulnerable in our state, not punishing those who are different. Ohio can and should be a leader in inclusivity, and this bill takes us in the exact opposite direction.

4. What This Means for Ohio's Reputation

Passing HB 96 would stain Ohio's reputation, not just in the eyes of its citizens, but across the entire country. Ohio has historically been a state of common sense, reason, and fairness—values that have guided us through many challenges. Enacting laws that strip away rights from our citizens will alienate Ohio from many of its allies, both political and economic. This would further isolate our state from the progressive legal trends that have shaped the country in recent decades.

As a conservative state, Ohio is at a crossroads. We must decide whether we want to be a beacon of freedom and opportunity or whether we will fall into the trap of narrow-minded policies that restrict individual freedoms and hurt the state economically.

Conclusion: A Call for Transparency and Accountability

It is critical that the changes contained in HB 96 be subjected to the proper legislative process. These are not mere budgetary issues; they are fundamental questions about the rights of Ohioans and the future of our state. I urge you to reject the current form of this bill and instead ensure that any policy changes related to LGBTQ rights or abortion care be treated with the respect and openness they deserve—through standalone legislation that allows for meaningful debate and input from all stakeholders.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I ask that you stand up for Ohio's future and reject HB 96 in its current form.

Sincerely,
Madeline Eckhart
Cofounder
DreamStates