

Ohio House Health Committee Testimony
HB 96

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Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston.

My name is Dan Williamson and I'm here in opposition to language included in HB 96, as passed by the Ohio House.

I've lived in Ohio since 1981 when my dad was hired as pastor of a church in Licking County, and I'm here today as a parent.

My older child, Riley, just completed his freshman year at The Ohio State University. He's funny and he's kind to everyone. He works hard, he gets good grades, and he's transgender.

Riley mostly flies under the radar, which is easier to do when you're 5-foot-2. Other than his closest friends, and students who knew him in high school, his classmates don't know that he's transgender. He isn't ashamed or embarrassed about it; it just not what he's most interested in talking about.

I think if you knew Riley, most of you would like him, and you wouldn't make his life any harder than it already is.

When I first learned that Riley was transgender four and a half years ago, I went through the various stages of anxiety and denial that you might expect of a 50-year-old dad. I knew that his life would be more difficult than mine was in a variety of ways. I knew that some people wouldn't like him and that some of life's options would be closed to him. I never expected that his government would come after him. But it has.

The House included language in HB 96 that doesn't belong in the budget bill, or any other legislation for that matter. The language does not appear to serve any public policy goals but to punish transgender Ohioans, whether it's homeless kids, those who need mental health services, or those Ohioans – like my kid – who are just trying to live their lives, quietly and with dignity.

In addition, the House included language in HB 96 that declares that Riley and other trans Ohioans simply do not exist. This outrages me for obvious reasons, but it also scares me because I have no idea how it would be wielded and interpreted as he goes through life, finding employment, seeking medical care or starting a family.

I believe every member of this committee, regardless of party, regardless of ideology, got into public service because you want to help people. But these proposals in HB 96 don't help anybody, including the 99 percent of Ohioans who are not transgender.

Gender dysphoria is not contagious. I can attest to this firsthand because my younger son turns 15 next week, and he's not transgender. Riley is not a threat to anyone. He is not a gender ideology extremist, and he's never asked anyone to share their pronouns. He's just another Ohioan trying to live a productive and happy life.

Please remove this harmful language from HB 96, and give my child and other young Ohioans like him a chance to do just that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I am pleased to answer any questions.