



Written Testimony  
May, 13th, 2025  
Opposition to House Bill 96

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and Members of the Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in opposition to HB 96. My name is Dr. Kelsey Ward, and I am writing on behalf of the Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities of Ohio (SAIGEO). I act as the Information Technology Support and Central Representative for SAIGEO. I am a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor with a Supervisory designation in Columbus, Ohio, and work as a full-time counselor educator. I have conducted and published research surrounding transgender individuals, have spoken at state, regional, and national conferences on LGBTQIA+ issues, and have been invited to train colleagues on caring for gender diverse clients. My clinical work also focuses on LGBTQIA+ mental health, particularly surrounding gender identity. Therefore, my professional focus and education make me well-qualified to write on this topic today.

SAIGEO is strongly opposed to the discriminatory and healthcare-limiting amendments within HB 96. The additions of discriminatory, harmful, and factually inaccurate components surrounding LGBTQIA+ people do not belong in our proposed state budget.

This proposed budget would negatively impact LGBTQIA+ people by ending funding for homeless shelters that help LGBTQ+ youth and families, incorrectly redefining gender as two sexes, requiring materials in libraries with LGBTQIA+ content be made inaccessible to specific age groups, banning pride flags at government buildings, restricting Medicaid funding for most gender affirming care, and banning public buildings from placing menstrual products in men's restrooms.

These components are not only overtly discriminatory towards transgender and LGBTQIA+ people, but they are fundamentally harmful to mental health and well-being. In addition to lived experience that has been voiced by LGBTQIA+ people time and time again, there is robust evidence from research that discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals leads to worse mental health outcomes. <sup>1</sup> As a mental health provider who cares for LGBTQIA+ individuals, I have also seen the mental health impact of discriminatory behaviors, laws, and language from the general public and our state government, causing LGBTQIA+ Ohioans not to feel cared for or safe in the state of Ohio at this time.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the redefinition of gender and sex is factually incorrect and further erases marginalized communities, which further contributes to poor mental health outcomes. Sex is not strictly binary; people who are intersex have characteristics of males and females, whether through chromosomal variations (such as Klinefelter or Turner Syndrome), hormonal differences (such as Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome or Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia), gonadal differences (such as under- or non-developed gonads or both ovarian and testicular tissue), anatomical differences (such as ambiguous genitalia), or even cases of two or more different sets of DNA in an individual. <sup>2</sup> In fact, up to 1.7% of the population may be intersex when these factors are all taken into account. <sup>3,4</sup> This definition is also harmful to gender expansive people who are not intersex; by defining sex in such a binary way, it erases the reality of gender expansive, transgender, and nonbinary individuals, who have existed all throughout human history. <sup>5</sup> Furthermore, this redefinition establishes a state policy that attempts to misconstrue gender and sex in this strict, unchanging binary. This is a clear attempt to erase the diverse experiences of gender in the transgender community.

The mental health and well-being of *all* Ohioans is something that I hope you will consider, as the LGBTQIA+ community makes up approximately 6.2% of the state of Ohio's population, equal to about 557,000 adults, with even higher numbers for youth. <sup>6</sup> As it stands currently, HB 96 erases and dehumanizes LGBTQIA+ people who already live, work, and play in the state of Ohio. In addition, the restriction of funding gender affirming care creates additional harm. SAIGEO will continue to stand in opposition to legislation that attempts to restrict access to healthcare, for any Ohioans. As a mental health provider, I see and understand the harm that comes with erasing and dehumanizing LGBTQIA+ people. The components of HB 96 that I have previously outlined will undoubtedly impact the mental health and well-being of LGBTQIA+ Ohioans, regardless of the intention of these components.

SAIGEO and I request that you consider this testimony, and the mental health and well-being of LGBTQIA+ Ohioans, when considering this proposed budget. Ohio's budget deserves to focus on supporting the needs of all of Ohio's citizens.

Sincerely,

*Kelsey Ward, PhD, LPCC-S, NCC, CCMHC*

Kelsey Ward

PhD, LPCC-S, NCC, CCMHC

Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities of Ohio (SAIGEO)

saigeohio@gmail.com

Edited by Mariah Payne, MA, LPCC, SAIGEO 2024-2025 President-Elect