

## Senate Medicaid Committee

Testimony on HB 96, May 6 2025

Thank you Chairman Romanchuk, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee. I appreciate your time, as well as the opportunity to speak on this bill - especially when such opportunity was not afforded while it was in committee in the House. My name is Justin Baker. I am a lifelong resident of Ohio, a software administrator at a major IT services provider, and most importantly to the committee today, I am a trans Ohioan. I am here today to speak in opposition to Section 333.13 concerning Medicaid funding to mental health providers who affirm transgender identity.

To illustrate my connection to this issue, I'd like to share with you a little bit of my mental health journey. This may be distressing to hear for people sensitive to discussions of severe mental illness, but I think it is necessary to demonstrate the stakes here. The first time I made a plan to kill myself, I was 12 years old. I was overwhelmed academically at school due to untreated ADHD. My parents had gotten me diagnosed two years earlier, but decided to not provide me with any kind of treatment. I also was subjected to vicious bullying. I had developed the kind of hypervigilance often seen in PTSD by the time I was 11. Constantly looking over my shoulder, constantly looking for ways to make an expedient escape. But of course, you can't just run out of the room when the source of stress is drifting ever closer to failing your classes. So my brain started wandering towards suicidal thoughts as an escape.

I continued to struggle with periodic thoughts of suicide through the rest of my school years. I was able to finally seek mental health treatment on my own when I got to college. I started with the university counseling center, and within a couple months I was set up with an excellent therapist and an excellent psychiatrist.

Despite the best efforts of myself and my care team, I yet again had a bout of severe depression. I was making plans again, and on more than a few occasions I had stood on the proverbial edge, looking at the drop below. I shared with my psychiatrist how close I had gotten, and she correctly said that I needed to go to the hospital. No mental health hospitalization is pleasant, but it kept me alive. It took me away from that edge, and kept me away from it for a while. About half a year later, I ended up in the hospital again, needing to be pulled away from the edge.

After my second hospitalization, I made drastic changes to my life under the advice of my care team. I prioritized my mental health, and gradually it started to improve. I firmly believe that if it were not for the excellent care provided by my mental health professionals, and my inpatient stays, I would not be alive to speak to you today. This bill would take my mental health care team away from me.

As I mentioned before, I am trans. My care team understands, in line with professional medical standards of care, that my transness is an immutable part of me. They cannot provide me care

without acknowledging and accepting that I am trans. While this bill does not strictly preclude providers from practicing according to accepted medical guidelines, the financial realities of the bill do.

Senator Liston, as a medical doctor yourself, you understand how many people in Ohio rely on medicaid to be able to afford health care. One in five Ohioans receive healthcare through medicaid. This makes medicaid a critical payor of healthcare costs. One that providers simply cannot afford to be cut off from. Under this bill, mental health providers will be forced to make an impossible choice. Doom their practice by giving up a massive part of their revenue, or refuse to continue treating their trans patients. This is not a choice. An organization has no choice but to ensure its survival. So, under this bill, mental health providers must refuse to treat transgender patients.

If it were not for my mental health care team, I would have died several times over. I am not alone in this. The UCLA School of Law has found that 81% of trans adults have thought about suicide, and 42% have attempted suicide. This data only includes the trans people who are still alive to tell us about their suicidal thoughts and behaviors. There is a crisis of our society ostracizing trans people to the extent that they are killing themselves and exceedingly high rates. At a time when trans people are under attack in unprecedented ways, taking away their mental health care will result in a catastrophe of trans suicides. Taking healthcare away from trans people will kill trans people. Taking healthcare away from trans people will kill me.

Members of the Medicaid Committee, I beseech you. Strike section 333.13 from this bill. Strike all of the anti-trans provisions from this bill. Do not take healthcare away from trans people. Do not kill trans people. Do not kill me.

Thank you for your time. I welcome any questions.

Justin Baker