

Testimony of Shelby Dotson
Before the Medicaid Committee
Representative Mark Romanchuk, Chair
May 5, 2025

Chair Romanchuk, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Liston and members of the Medicaid Committee.

Good morning to all members of the committee. My name is Shelby Dotson. I am an Ohio resident testifying today in opposition to House Bill 96. This bill would disallow the use of Medicaid to provide gender affirming mental health care for transgender individuals like myself.

Before I get into it I want to start by telling you a little about me. I was born and raised in Adams County and my family has been here for four generations. I work part time and go to college full-time at the University of Cincinnati, where I'm a straight-A student. I hope to earn a degree in environmental science and go on to get a career in wildlife restoration. I live with my boyfriend and our two cats, whom I love very much. In my spare time I do photography, make art, write, and spend time with my friends.

All of that may seem unrelated, but I am compelled to remind people of my humanity after so much of it has been stolen by hateful rhetoric. In the last few years trans people have become a political scapegoat. Right-wing extremists claim that we are dangerous. They use fear and false information to turn our own communities against us. It's gotten to the point where we can't even draw up a state budget without something being snuck in to punch down at trans people. This same pattern of prejudice has been seen time and time again throughout history. It's exhausting. As someone who is only trying to get on with my life, I can't help but believe that our time and energy is better spent elsewhere.

I also want to tell you that I am no stranger to mental health struggles. I have battled suicidal thoughts since age 11. For a long time I couldn't see a path forward, and sometimes I came close to giving up. However, acceptance has allowed me to picture a future that I can belong in. Being trans has given me permission to be myself. It is the only reason that I have the courage to stand before you today. I am the happiest I have been in my entire life, and I deserve to have access to healthcare that facilitates that happiness. I deserve to make informed medical decisions about my health.

I am just one of countless people who have had their lives changed for the better due to gender affirming care. Gender affirming practices are the basic standard of care for transgender people. These are resources that help prevent self harm, suicide, drug addiction, depression, and anxiety. They benefit everyone, not just the trans community. Since there is overwhelming evidence that shows gender affirming healthcare to be essential to our well-being, often being the only successful treatment, I can see no reason for its denial other than cruelty.

In a world with more than its fair share of cruelty, please choose to be kind. The trans community is in need of support now more than ever. Our existence is not just a buzzword. There are living, breathing people attached to the end of these bills whose only agenda is to survive. I urge you to not cut access to mental health services that are lifelines for many. Ohio should defend its citizens and their rights, not follow hateful trends. Be leaders. Protect our right to life saving healthcare. Reject House Bill 96.

I thank you for your time and consideration. If there are any questions from the committee, I am happy to answer them.