

In Opposition to Section 333.13 of House Bill 96

Before the House Medicaid Committee

Chairman Romanchuk, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to present opponent testimony today.

My name is Ciara Aune and I'm a transgender woman. I am here to speak against the harmful and cruel anti-trans provisions in this bill, specifically section 333.13 which would block Medicaid funding for gender-affirming mental health services. To give the scientific consensus on this matter, I'd first like to share part of a recent statement by the American Psychological Association:

"Research clearly shows that supportive mental health care greatly reduces the risk of depression, suicide, and other negative outcomes for transgender and nonbinary youth. Psychotherapeutic treatment for transgender and nonbinary youth should aim to help children and adolescents explore and understand, rather than change, their gender identity.

Eliminating or reducing access to mental health supports for transgender, gender-diverse and nonbinary populations contradicts established psychological science and risks perpetuating harm to people whose gender identity may be different from their biological sex assigned at birth." - (*APA Statement on Access to Treatment for Transgender, Gender Diverse, and Nonbinary People*, May 1, 2025)

I'd also like to share with you part of my mental health journey in regards to my gender. When I was a child, I didn't have access to gender affirming care resources. I grew up in a time and place where it was quite clear that if I told people that I wished I were a girl, it would have been both socially and physically dangerous for me. To protect myself, I hid those feelings from everyone, including myself. I buried them so deeply that I even convinced myself that they didn't exist. I then spent the next 25 years playing the part of a cisgendered man. Of course, repressing a core part of oneself rarely goes well. I ended up depressed for most of those 25 years. I considered suicide several times but managed to convince myself not to go through with it. Imagine being unable to feel joy. That was my everyday existence for 25 years.

In 2023, with the support of my therapist, I finally started thinking about my gender. I thought about how I had felt as a child and other signs throughout my life. I concluded that I must be transgender. I started transitioning in late 2023 and it's been the most incredible improvement in my life. I'm finally happy. The depression that I had for 25 years is gone. I now regularly experience joy that I couldn't have dreamed of before. Without my therapist helping me through that, I would either still be depressed, or I would be dead.

This provision would affect all transgender Ohioans but it especially breaks my heart to think about the transgender kids going through this right now. They are just like I was. They have the potential to be happy now if given supportive, science-based care. Please don't condemn transgender kids or any transgender person to a lifetime of depression, or worse. Their lives are in your hands. I urge this committee: do not take funding away from gender-affirming mental health services.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome any questions you may have.

APA Statement on Access to Treatment for Transgender, Gender Diverse, and Nonbinary People. (May 1, 2025). Retrieved May 4, 2025, from <https://updates.apaservices.org/statement-on-access-to-treatment-for-transgender-gender-diverse-and-nonbinary-people>