

## **Olivia Bitecofer**

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee, thank you for this opportunity to voice my opposition to House Bill 454. My name is Olivia Bitecofer, I am a 15 year old trans woman from Akron, Ohio. My pronouns are she/her. I strongly oppose House Bill 454, preventing youth from receiving proper medical care.

I've dealt with body related gender dysphoria as long as I can remember. As a kid I refused to wear tight and formal clothing due to how upset seeing my body and presenting as male was to me, and these feelings got much worse as I got older. When I began puberty, what began as just discomfort gave way to feelings of depression and anxiety, as I tried to cope with the existential dread that came with knowing that I was trapped in a body that directly conflicted with who I knew I was. I am fortunate enough to have supportive parents who referred me to the Akron Children's Hospital's Gender Affirming Care team where I was given access to counseling and therapy. After I had gotten approval from my therapist, I started hormone blockers last December. Not having to worry about the irreversible physical changes that come with puberty immensely improved my mental health. This allowed me to develop my identity in a less stressed, more stable headspace. Me and my parents were fully educated by medical professionals about the effects of hormone blockers, as well as the risks. I was given access to cognitive-behavioral therapy and only allowed to proceed with my treatments once I was deemed mentally stable, well-educated and truly in need of gender affirming action.

I am close friends with a number of trans people who do not have the same privilege as me, and who experience much worse dysphoria than I do, to the point where it makes them unable to function in everyday life. Most of them deal with suicidal thoughts and resort to self harm because of this. I nearly lost my best friend after he attempted suicide due to the immense stress his lack of proper medical care put him through. Many people in this situation resort to self medicating and taking unprescribed hormone treatments, an extremely dangerous affair, but one they are forced into because the alternative for them is suffering through feelings that could cost them their life. Gender affirming healthcare is life saving healthcare, and denying life saving healthcare to a social minority is, by definition, genocide.

This brings me to the main statement behind my testimony; the choices here are not between trans kids transitioning and trans kids not transitioning. The choice is between trans kids transitioning safely with the help of doctors and psychologists, or trans kids transitioning dangerously on their own. The solution to kids transitioning and regretting it later on is NOT barring them from access to gender affirming healthcare like puberty blockers and hormone replacement therapy. Rather, it is to make trans healthcare easily accessible to kids and allowing them the help of medical professionals. When kids have access to the kind of treatment I am lucky enough to be provided, they are, with the help of their parents, able to take safe gender affirming action and make well educated decisions. By taking away this opportunity, you are not only denying them life saving healthcare, but encouraging, if not forcing them to choose the dangerous alternative that is self medicating.

This is why I oppose House Bill 454. I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this hateful and, quite honestly, dangerous bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. Again, thank you for allowing me to testify today. I hope I was able to encourage you to support the rights of trans kids and set a positive example for the rest of the country, as well as the rest of the world.

I urge you to oppose HB 454 and protect our state's youth.