



Safe Children, Stable Families, Supportive Communities

House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee
Opponent Party Testimony HB454
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Mary D. Wachtel
Director of Public Policy
mary@pcsao.org
614.224.5802

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, and Ranking Member Denson, this written opponent testimony for HB454, *Enact the Save Adolescents from Experimentation Act*, is submitted on behalf of the members of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). PCSAO is a membership-driven association of Ohio's county public children services agencies (PCSAs) that advocates for sound public policy, promotes program excellence, and builds public value for safe children, stable families, and supportive communities.

PCSAO's member-led Legislative Committee and Board of Trustees review legislation for possible impact on children and families served by the children services system and on county public children services agencies. It is through that lens that we reviewed HB454, *Enact the Save Adolescents from Experimentation Act*, and concluded that we must oppose this bill.

Research confirms that LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning) youth are over-represented in the foster care system. About 30 percent of youth in foster care identify as LGBTQ and 5 percent as transgender, in comparison to 11 percent and 1 percent of youth not in foster care.ⁱ Furthermore, LGBTQ+ youth of color are not only over-represented in the child welfare system, but they also stay longer in foster care and have an increased risk of experiencing discrimination and violence compared to their peers.ⁱⁱ

LGBTQ youth enter the foster care system for many of the same reasons as non-LGBTQ youth in care, including abuse, neglect, and parental substance abuse. Unfortunately, many LGBTQ youth have the added trauma that comes with being rejected or mistreated because of their

sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Those facing the most extreme levels of family rejection and maltreatment—including violenceⁱⁱⁱ--are often forced out of their homes, or will run away, becoming homeless or entering the foster care system.

This trauma takes its toll. LGBTQ youth are twice as likely to attempt suicide than their non-LGBTQ peers.^{iv} However, LGBTQ youth who found their school to be LGBTQ-affirming reported lower rates of attempting suicide.^v

As front-line workers, PCSAs see every day the struggles that Ohio's vulnerable youth, including LGBTQ youth, face. The threat of family rejection and maltreatment are real for too many youth. Health care that is evidence-based and meets approved clinical guidelines must remain available for LGBTQ youth and their families, especially those diagnosed with gender dysphoria. Limiting health care for vulnerable youth, including those in foster care, will impact their ability to heal.

For these reasons, we urge the Committee to oppose HB454. Please contact me if you have questions about this testimony. Thank you.

ⁱ Baams, L., Wilson, B. D., & Russell, S. T. (2019). LGBTQ youth in unstable housing and foster care. *Pediatrics*, 143(3), e20174211. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-4211>; Matarese, M., Greeno, E., Weeks, A., Hammond, P. (2021). *The Cuyahoga youth count: A report on LGBTQ+ youth's experience in foster care*. Baltimore, MD: The Institute for Innovation & Implementation, University of Maryland School of Social Work. <https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/our-work/national/lgbtq/cuyahoga-youth-count/>; and Sandfort, T. (2020). Experiences and well-being of sexual and gender diverse youth in foster care in New York City: Disproportionality and disparities. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/about/2020/WellBeingStudyLGBTQ.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Conron, K. J., & Goldberg, S. K. (2020, July). *Adult LGBT population in the United States*. The Williams Institute. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBTAdult-US-Pop-Jul-2020.pdf>; Kastanis, A. A., Wilson B. D. (2015). *Sexual and Gender Minority Disproportionality and Disparities in Child Welfare: A Population-based study*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740915300463>

ⁱⁱⁱ 30% of LGBTQ youth in the foster care system report physical violence by family members after disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity. Vermont Juvenile Court Improvement Program. (2017). *LGBTQ youth in foster care*. https://www.vermontjudiciary.org/sites/default/files/documents/LGBTQ_InfoBulletin.pdf

^{iv} The Trevor Project. (2022). *2022 national survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health*.
<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/>

^v Ibid.