

**House Higher Education Committee
Chairman Tom Young
Opponent Testimony for House Bill 183**

October 10, 2023

Written Testimony
Submitted by Tanya Salyers
Director of Advocacy, YWCA Columbus

Chair Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing the opportunity to submit testimony. YWCA Columbus has served the central Ohio region for over 100 years, and our mission of eliminating racism, empowering women, and bringing peace, justice, freedom, and dignity to all guides our long history supporting women and families in our community.

We oppose House Bill 183 because this bill undermines the experiences of trans youth and gender diverse students, causes harm to their emotional well-being and mental health, and continues to create hostile environments in our schools and communities – the consequences of which have already and will continue to directly affect those we serve.

Through our housing program, YWCA Columbus operates a shelter serving women and families in crisis, and we see firsthand the harm caused by legislation like H.B. 183. LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately affected by housing instability. According to the Trevor Project¹, 28% of LGBTQ+ youth reported experiencing homelessness or housing instability at some point in their lives – and those who did had two to four times the odds of reporting depression, anxiety, self-harm, considering suicide, and attempting suicide compared to those with stable housing, often because they lack a gender-affirming and supportive household. Schools play an important role in the well-being of children and young adults. Students deserve to feel safe in their learning environments, free from discrimination, bullying, mistreatment, and violence. In a recent study², 32% of transgender people reported reducing their food and drink consumption to avoid using the bathroom. Access to safe, gender-affirming schools and basic facilities – especially if their homes have become unsafe – is crucial for their survival, and for mitigating the youth homelessness crisis that continues to grow.

Moreover, at YWCA Columbus, we seek to empower young girls and women in their authentic selves through our programming, including transgender girls and young women and nonbinary youth, and we advocate for policies that affirm the right to well-being, autonomy, and belonging. We oppose the use of

¹<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/#:~:text=28%25%20of%20LGBTQ%20youth%20reported,to%20those%20with%20stable%20housing.>

²https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Separation_and_Stigma_2017.pdf

“biological sex” outlined in the bill that relegates the restrictions within to either male or female in accordance with the sex listed on a person’s original birth record. At YWCA Columbus, we are on a mission to eliminate racism and empower women – all women, especially those most gender marginalized. We believe the inclusion of transwomen and girls is critical to women’s empowerment. By imposing such a limiting definition of “biological sex,” H.B. 183 erases the experiences of the youth and young adults who are most affected by the implications of this policy.

Further, the use of “biological sex” creates an enforcement mechanism that poses a safety risk for anyone who may not be feminine or masculine enough in another person’s eyes. Transgender people are already four times more likely to experience violent crime than their LGBTQ+ peers. Of students who were out as transgender in K-12, 77% had negative experiences in school as a result – including, but not limited to, verbal harassment, and physical or sexual assault; 24% were physically attacked by peers; and 13% were sexually assaulted.³ This bill does not protect the students it purports to – it only creates opportunities for bullying, harassment, and violence against those who are already experiencing harm at a compounded rate compared to their peers.

The far-reaching impact of H.B. 183 is harmful to Ohio communities – ultimately hurting our economic future. Similar bills have caused bedrock employers to leave communities, and as we turn our eyes toward growth – especially where we are located in central Ohio – these policies will turn away our best and brightest. Our schools not only nourish our students’ minds, but they act as the substrate for the growth of students into holistic, empathetic, and productive members of the next generation of Ohioans. We should focus our efforts in K-12 and higher education systems toward excellence for this and future generations, and that includes ensuring that we do not discriminate against our most marginalized students.

I respectfully and strongly encourage members of the House Higher Education Committee to oppose the passage of H.B. 183. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to this legislation.

Tanya Salyers
Director of Advocacy
YWCA Columbus

³<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/fact-sheet-importance-sports-participation-transgender-youth/>