

Testimony on House Bill 8
House Primary & Secondary Education Committee

Submitted by:
Deborah Cooper

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the committee:

Thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to HB 8.

I am an Ohio resident, a voter, and a former educator who has taught at all grade levels from kindergarten through 12th grade, as both a full-time and a substitute teacher in both public and private schools.

Parents have input as well as recourse in our public/taxpayer-funded schools (though this is not generally the case in private schools). Public school teachers encourage parent participation, and parents not only elect their school board members, but can attend those public meetings to voice their concerns. Citizens also have the power of the purse, and can support or defeat school levies.

HB 8 assumes that:

- 1) school districts do not listen to parents,
- 2) students can't "opt out" of some particularly sensitive and personal subject matters,
- 3) school district leaders do not understand and teachers are not trained in how to handle matters related to students' mental, emotional or physical health.

Such assumptions are dangerous and disingenuous. Interestingly, they apply only to PUBLIC schools. Right now in Ohio, there is a robust network of homeschools that teaches Nazi principles, without apparent accountability. Can any lawmaker reasonably claim that such training is not dangerous to students' mental and emotional health?

Lawmakers find it easier to take aim at public schools, despite the many ways public school systems are accountable to citizens. Are lawmakers willing to dismantle our ONE common public system (as mandated by Ohio's constitution) and its system, which DOES consider parents' input, in favor of a privatized system that can operate with little to no oversight?

Of course, parents won't ALWAYS get their way when voicing their concerns to their public school systems. This would be impossible. School district leaders must weigh many differing concerns, and must keep in mind their duty to serve ALL students. Serving all students means, for example, that school districts must respect their students' gender differences. If serving such students is considered "sexually explicit," then I would suggest lawmakers should do a little research on gender differences, which is not a matter of "sex" so much as of identity.

Public schools do not have the luxury of refusing to admit or retain students, as private schools do. Therefore, they must do their best to foster respect among all students. Some students, unfortunately, become victims of bullying specifically because of their differences, including those related to gender, race, culture and religion. I submit that we would not want teachers to endorse bullying of any "different" student. Rather, I hope we would expect teachers to educate students and help them recognize the harm bullying based on perceived differences can do. This inclusive sort of teaching helps everyone – victims and bullies alike, and any "parents' bill of rights" should certainly include an expectation that teachers foster a culture of respect for the

diversity among students.

Lawmakers should not be in the business of deciding for public school districts what and how their teachers teach. School districts should continue to listen to the concerns of ALL parents, and decide, based not only on that input but also on the best available data from educational experts, what is best for their students.

Please do not allow HB 8 to move forward.

Sincerely,

Deborah K. Cooper