



**Belonging Begins Here.**

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Chairman Bird, Ranking Member Robison, and Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 8. My name is Madison Hernandez, and I use they/she pronouns. Currently, I work as the Rapid Rehousing Case Manager at Kaleidoscope Youth Center, Ohio's most prominent and longest-running LGBTQIA+ youth center in Ohio. Before my work at Kaleidoscope, I was an Ongoing Case Manager with Fairfield County Child Protective Services.

I was an Ongoing Case Manager for three years and have been with Kaleidoscope Youth Center for six months. In my years of social work, I have worked with youth as young as a few months old to young adults who are twenty-four years old and everything in between. I have also had the opportunity to work with parents who are still teenagers and parents who are in their 50s and, again, everything in between. In my work at Fairfield County, I often helped parents get the support and services they needed to make their home a safe and stable place for their children. I was a government worker, and I represented Fairfield County. So when I hear phrases like "We do not co-parent with the government," I know that this person has a gross misunderstanding of Ohio and Federal Laws. Parents co-parent with the government as federal and state governments have laws pertaining to how you must raise your child. Child abuse and child neglect laws have been passed and enforced throughout the history of the United States. These include but are not limited to: you must send your child to school or show proof that you are homeschooling your child, you must provide food to your child, you must keep your child in adequate health, you must provide safe housing for your child, and the list goes on and on. As a government worker, I worked to enforce these laws on parents. I can see how it is easy for parents to ignore these laws, as they wholeheartedly believe they have the right to raise their children however they see fit. But I want to remind everyone here that the families I worked with did not get that. They did not get to choose how they parent their children; they had to follow the rules that I, representing the government, enforced. Families all over the United States do not get to choose whether or not the government gets involved in their and their children's lives. I would also like to point out that in all my years at Children's Services, I rarely saw parents who so horribly beat or neglected their children on purpose. Almost all of the families I worked with were people caught in horrible situations outside their control. They did what they had to do to survive. Yet I still told them that what they were doing was not good enough. I can not speak on behalf of the families that I worked with, as I could never understand the situations that they existed in. I can say that the families I worked with would love to have the platform you gave the supporters of House Bill 8. They would love the opportunity to show you the lack of autonomy the government provides to those who can not afford or manage to take care of their children.

As someone who worked in Children's Services for years and continues to work with children, it is outrageous that the Ohio House would even consider a bill like House Bill 8. Supporters of House Bill 8 are taking the argument of "I do not want to coparent with the government" too far. Instead of understanding the complexities around child abuse and neglect, you are passing a law that instead allows child abuse and neglect on behalf of your political and religious beliefs. In all my work with children, including when I worked with the government, I never told parents that they had to raise their children with certain morals. I never told parents they could not pass down their values to their children. The government does not mean you can not raise your children as you want to. However, a child has the right to refuse those morals and values and still get adequate care from their parents. What House Bill 8 does is not protect parents' requests. It denies children their rights. Children often go to teachers, social workers, or any other adult they feel comfortable with because they are at first scared to go to their parents. I understand to most parents that this is scary. In my experience, it is hard for parents to know why a child would go to another adult, not their parent. However, it is essential to note that the Ohio Revised Code, the Ohio Counselor and Social Worker Board, and the NASW Code of Ethics already have best practice structures built into our practice to protect the confidentiality and engage families when it is in the best interest of the young person, which means that the information that parents are seeking from counselors, teachers, and social workers will be available to them and that there are already rules written down about how parents should receive this information. This best practice is what I followed in my job at Children Services and what I continue to follow at Kaleidoscope Youth Center. House Bill 8 states that it would "Prohibit school personnel from encouraging a student to withhold from a parent information about the student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being or services related to the student's health. Despite this general prohibition, if a reasonably prudent person would believe such a disclosure would result in a parent abusing, abandoning, or neglecting the student, school personnel may withhold a student's health information from that parent. This belief may not be based on the parent's religious or political beliefs." If there are already best practices in place to encourage parent engagement, why do we need a law to force parent engagement? Specifically, I would like to highlight where it states "this belief may not be based on a parent's religious or political beliefs." This quote says that a social worker must ignore if the child were to get beaten or neglected by their parents because of the parent's political and religious beliefs. What this shows me, and what it shows everyone else, is that supporters of House Bill 8 want their children to follow their political and religious beliefs by any means necessary, even if it means beating them into them.

In my experience working with children, they rarely want to hide things from their parents. Even when children know that their parents will hate or hit them, they still seek their parents' validation. Children want love and support from their parents. They want their parents to listen to them. I often encourage the children I work with to express their feelings to their parents, even if their parents disagree. I often encourage the children I worked with to see how their parents see things. I enable them to provide the empathy to their parents that they want from their parents. I want to give compassion to supporters of House Bill 8. I understand it is scary when your children go to other adults and not you first. You are there to protect, love, and keep them safe, and it feels scary when your child does not see that. But understand that your child does see that. If you love and support your child, they will see that and tell you everything when they are ready. However, if you continue forcing your child to listen to you by any means necessary and taking away their ability to talk to other adults, you will surely drive your children away. To the members of the House, supporting House Bill 8 does not support parent's rights. Supporting

House Bill 8 takes away children's rights and it will allow parents to no longer be reported for abusing their children based on their political and religious beliefs.