

May 8, 2023

Testimony in opposition to HB 8

Good afternoon.

Chair Bird, Vice-chair Fowler-Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson and Members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to HB 8.

My name is Cathi Kulik. I am a resident of Westerville, a parent, a grandparent, and a retired Olentangy teacher. Today I am here to testify in opposition to HB 8. I oppose this bill for a number of reasons:

- in reference to the Ohio constitution, we are a home rule state, and this removes the power of the local school boards to develop policies based upon the needs of their individual communities and puts that power in the hands of the state
- parents already have the right to review all materials used in schools and to request alternative assignments, so this bill creates a mandate that already exists
- there is no definition of “sexually explicit”
- what does “notifying parents of a school’s ability to provide a safe learning environment” mean and how is that notification process to take place?

As I thought about this bill, I found myself thinking about this in the context of being a parent and a teacher, jobs that require me to use my judgement, and this bill sends the message that you do not trust me to do that.

Let’s start with teacher. I taught primarily fifth through eighth graders. A child comes into my classroom, telling me how frustrated she is with her mother because her mother insists on setting her homework schedule. My typical reaction would be to have a conversation with this child to help her to see ways to remedy her situation and then send her back to her mom with a few tools to have a productive conversation and to allow this student to have agency over her life. Does this fall under the category of withholding information about a child’s well-being? Do you expect me to call the mother? How do I know what situations warrant a phone call and what situations do not? There is no guidance in this bill.

As a parent, particularly during my children's teen years, I valued and hoped for, adults who loved and supported my children. As many as possible. I have thought of many examples of times in my children's lives that I was so grateful for adults that were not my husband or me. I'd like to share a story about my daughter. She played high school basketball for the same coach for four years. He was the best, and they developed a relationship that extended past her college career and ended when he died tragically of colon cancer. I know there were situations that he dealt with that involved my daughter that he never told me about, and I was fine with that. I trusted his judgement, and by not coming to me, he taught her to solve her problems without her parents, which is what I was going for as a parent. And she trusted him as a confidant. Whether we like it or not, our kids are not always going to come to us with their concerns. I don't think it is up to the government to decide whom I, as the parent, choose to trust with my kids. It is my right to make those decisions, and this bill infringes upon that right.

Calling this a "Parental Bill of Rights" is an interesting strategy. This bill takes away my rights as a parent to choose whomever I choose to support my kids. It robs school boards of the right to develop policies, which is their function. I fail to see how this grants parents rights. From my perspective, the government is denying my rights to parent as I see fit for my kids.

I'm happy to respond to any question.