

**Opponent Testimony for HB 8
Primary and Secondary Education Committee
12-Jun-23**

Mary See-Kennedy

Chairman Bird, Vice Chair Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee:

Thank you for reading my testimony today. My name is Mary See-Kennedy. My pronouns are she/her/hers. I am the mother of an exceptional, non-binary child who attends public school. I have lived in Ohio for more than half my life. This is my chosen home, and we love Ohio.

I am writing to oppose HB-8.

My child has never known anything but a loving, open, and affirming home that will accept and nurture them no matter what. Not all children can say that. My child has several friends who aren't out to their parents. School and friends are the safety net these kids need to be wholly true to themselves. Forcing school districts to out at-risk children to their families is hateful and misleading. We know this poses serious harm to LGBTQ+ students. Only they should determine when, how, and with whom they share this information. We are already facing a teacher shortage, underfunding, and an inability to meet the needs for mental health services. Ohio already has regulations that govern parental notice, review, and opting out of instruction in our public schools. This bill will undoubtedly add significant strain to our already strained education system.

I am very concerned about the bill's intentionally vague definitions and what that potentially opens the door to. It is not a far leap to see that this vague language can easily be used to censor and target any content about gender identity, sexuality, and even family dynamics and relationships. Ohio's kids deserve the opportunity to grow up and be who they are meant to be. Please remember we are talking about kids. LGBTQ+ children in this state should never feel afraid or unwelcome. Families like mine right now are having to look at relocating. Bills like this will never bring a prosperous future to Ohio. Just last week, Governor DeWine and Lt Governor Husted discussed the need to keep well-educated adults living and working in Ohio. This bill will have the opposite effect, now and in the future.

Please do not let HB 8 proceed. Listen to the citizens of this state. Block out the voices of hateful people that travel to Ohio to fill these chambers with lies that don't impact them directly. Listen to the state's children asking you just to let them live their lives and be who they are. All students deserve an honest, inclusive education in schools where they feel safe and valued. HB 8 is another extremist attempt to target already vulnerable and marginalized students and censor honest education. Please vote no on HB 8.

Thank you for your time today.