

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking member Listen and members of the Public Health Policy Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of House Bill 68, otherwise known as the SAFE Act."

My name is Ronli and I live in Columbus Ohio. I'm the mother of an 18yo boy who began questioning his gender identity at the beginning of high school.

At 14, my son announced that he had gender dysphoria, and immediately wanted to start hormone therapy and have top and bottom surgery, because he had decided it was the only way he could feel comfortable in his own body. He informed me that I must immediately start using She and Her pronouns, and the preferred name he had chosen. It did not make sense, that the little boy, who overshared anything that popped into his ADHD brain, and had never been uncomfortable, or wanted to dress up in gender non conforming clothes rewrote his childhood history, saying and he was born in the wrong body, but was too afraid to tell me.

As a parent you know your child. You watch their struggles and support them no matter what. You spend nights secretly crying in a closet, or behind the bathroom door, when you feel powerless to help them avoid the inevitable growing pains that they will experience. You look forward to watching them reach milestones, and look forward to seeing the next chapter as it unfolds.

Unfortunately middle school brought many growing pains both physical and emotional. Over the next two years he would become suicidal, depressed, and anxious, and would increasingly spend more time alone in his room. This was a boy who spent his entire childhood running and playing with a huge group of friends, outside in the sunshine being a happy quirky kid. Then puberty hit.

What teenager has not felt uncomfortable in their own body? Over the next two years he grew close to 3 inches a month. Can you imagine how uncomfortable you would feel in your own body growing at that rate? His pediatrician, though sympathetic, explained this was just part of growing up. Unfortunately this did not make it any easier to live through. By the time he reached high school he was looking for answers as to why he did not feel like he belonged and why he felt so uncomfortable in his ever changing body. This triggered trauma related anxiety, and early childhood PTSD, stemming from the fear that he would become his abusive biological father, who he witnessed abusing me in the first 2 years of life. He felt different than the other boys. So he looked for answers on the internet. The internet told him, if he felt uncomfortable in his own body he was trans. Being trans meant immediate medical intervention was necessary.

Let that sink in....a confused 14 year old, dealing with mental health issues due to early childhood trauma, was allowed to self diagnose himself with gender dysphoria based on watching youtube videos. What has been referred to as "Growing Pains" up until recently was all off a sudden a DSM diagnosable condition. When has there been another time in history where the solution to teenage growing pains has been immediate medical intervention, medication and surgery? Therapist, Administrators and Coaches accepted his self diagnosis based on nothing more than a 14 year olds opinion.

I rushed him to therapy mistakenly thinking the therapist would ask questions like "when did you start feeling like you were born in the wrong body?" Instead the therapist I entrusted to my son's mental health too did not refer us to a psychiatrist in order to get an actual diagnosis. He ignored my sons diagnosable mental health issues in order to affirm my son's self diagnosed gender identity, and proceeded to advocate for immediate hormone therapy that would lead to sterility and irreversible medical procedures....my son 14.

I wasn't asked about his mental health history, or what the GOALS of therapy were. I was asked if I wanted a dead son or a living daughter.

My son is a quirky, artistic, creative non-conforming, over sensitive, reactive kid, with severe ADHD. He has never "fit in" and has always longed to be accepted by his peers, without knowing how to navigate the social environment. Being the researcher that I am, I immediately went to the internet trying to figure out what was going on, because I knew deep down that hormone therapy and unnecessary plastic surgery was never going to address the inner feelings that he was battling with. The scripted logic that was coming out of his mouth made no sense, and was not based on any data or research. It was based on the Youtube personality he was now following like a cult leader, who offered videos and validation of this new identity, along with the support and affirmation he all of a sudden was being showered with by those around him.

This boy who didn't fit in was all of a sudden accepted, praised and cheered for by his teachers, coaches and peers and told how brave he was. I became the enemy standing in the way of his happiness and his true identity. I was not informed by the school when the counselor started pulling him out of class to join a support group, I was not told by the school when he changed his name and his preferred pronouns.

I had no way of parenting my child who I knew was suffering on the inside because I was dangerous and made him feel unsafe, even though there has been nothing in his life to prove that was the case. I was being asked to sentence my son to a life where he would never know the joys of being a father, by allowing him to take off-label medication that has never been FDA approved for use in teenagers or young adults for hormone therapy related to gender

dysphoria which would sterilize him and make it impossible for him to have children or a fulfilling sexual life as an adult. I was being told that my 14 year old was mature enough and had the right to make these life changing decisions, even though he could not legally smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol or make any other legal discussions. I was being told that if I did not agree I was the enemy and could not protect him from blindly starting down a path that would endanger his growing mind and body. I could lose custody of my child based on my refusal to give informed consent as other parents had here in Ohio. If he wanted to, he would be allowed to sterilize himself and make irreversible medical decisions that he would have to deal with for the rest of his life.

See:

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/16/health/ohio-transgender-teen-hearing-judge-decision/index.html>

Parental authority allows us to guide our children through the challenges they will face. This authority was taken away, and my son was NOT given a chance to figure out the underlying emotional causes of his internal conflict. The help that he so desperately needed to address his early childhood PTSD was taken away from him, in exchange of a gender identity which supposedly was the solution to his inner turmoil. He was promised a magic solution to real problems. His mental health was ignored in lieu of a quick fix, that in reality fixes nothing on the inside which is where the problem lives.

When the euphoria of the drugs and endorphins from surgery subside, they are still the same person on the inside, with the same problems only now they are only a shell of themselves having cut off body parts in a desperate search to cut out the emotional turmoil they are experiencing on the inside.