

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Andi, and I was born and raised in Northwest Ohio by my maternal grandmother. A strong Baptist woman, she gained custody of me after the court heard extensive evidence of the abuse and neglect I suffered at the hands of my mother. My grandmother took me in and set me on the path to become the person I am today. I've been happily married for nearly twenty years, and have a child currently trying to choose between universities.

Over the last ten years, through their friendships with my child, I have had the privilege to meet and grow to know several young people who identify as something other than cisgender. Everyone starts from zero knowledge on a given subject, and so I researched, read, and studied in hopes that I could better understand and communicate. I listened to podcasts by medical professionals, spoke to therapists and doctors, but most of all, I used Active Listening with each non-conforming person I met – adults and children alike.

I witnessed the way acceptance improved their lives. The love of their family – people who understood that a child is not a blank slate to project onto, but their own beautiful, individual soul – saved them from despair. Being seen and loved and supported eased psychological torment, grew confidence, joy, friendships, courage... Each person, to the one, flourished when loved.

And I witnessed the pain of rejection. Of being told their truth was not only wrong, but bad. The devastation of trust and hope shattered. The desperate begging to stay with us – simply because we listened without judgement. Because we allowed people the space to safely explore identity and feel out what their truth was. In at least two instances, children of divorce wept at times they had to spend with the parent or parents who refused to simply love their child for who they are. Children who knew they had to spend time with someone who intentionally wounded them with the wrong name, wrong pronouns – such simple gestures! Such simple ways to show or deny your child love – and yet the parent chose repeatedly to deny. It is bullying, at best, and abusive torment at worst.

I absolutely cannot wrap my head around this mindset – to deny your child's existence and truth. The home should be a place a child comes to rest and be their authentic self. Peers can be unkind enough – let home be a sanctuary. Taking on the world will be hard enough – let the parents be advocates.

The court is meant to look at evidence to determine the best interests of the child in custody hearings. Surely whether a parent loves their child enough to set aside ego and personal feelings matters. Surely it should weigh into the custody decision that a parent will not respect a child's wishes on even such small matters as pronouns and names. Basic respect and love –

shouldn't these things matter in a custody case? Wouldn't you want to know a judge considered the care and respect – or lack thereof - in deciding a child's best interest? Where would I be, had the courts been denied the ability to consider abuse when deciding whether to leave me in the care of my mother? I gravely doubt I would be here today to write this testimony.

I am respectfully asking the court to reconsider Sec 3109 of HR 68. Children should grow up in a safe, loving home – and an adult who intentionally and repeatedly treats a child with cruelty is not an adult who can provide that safety and love.

Thank you for your time.