

To Our State Legislators,

My name is Rev. Bryan Bucher. I am the father of four children and an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church since 1995.

As a father my oldest child came out to me as my transgender daughter in 2019. Aerica is now 24 years old. She lives in Columbus working as a paraprofessional aid with autistic children. Having paused her education during the pandemic, Aerica is returning to school to earn the necessary degrees that will enable her to work with families who have children on the spectrum of autism. It is her mission to help others celebrate and discover the gift of their human potential, particularly if they have been labeled by others.

Aerica's coming out to me was not an easy journey. Looking back at her upbringing, I realize now that as she emerged into adolescence she became very uncomfortable with her body. There were many warning signs that Aerica was struggling. As parents neither Aerica's mother or myself would have ever considered the possibility that our child was struggling with gender dysmorphia. I simply didn't understand what Aerica was going through.

I didn't understand the depth of her pain and confusion until one her professors at the college she was enrolled in risked their position by letting me know the depth of Aerica's depression second semester of her freshman year. That summer, having already once tried committing suicide, Aerica checked herself into our local ER and a behavioral health facility when all she wanted to do was take her own life. Since then she has made the difficult and courageous journey to discover and accept who she is, and how she can be of service to others. Gender-affirming care as she was able to find it has been transformational and essential for her well-being.

As a pastor I serve a congregation in the Westwood neighborhood in Cincinnati. There I have a wonderful family who is quite active in most every facet of the ministry. The oldest child in the family is getting ready to start middle school soon. He is our head acolyte. He is smart, funny and thoughtful. The member of a family that has been active for multiple generations, he is beloved by our congregation.

This child is a transgender boy who receives gender affirming care. His is a biologically oriented health issue that requires the very best pediatric medicine has to offer. His parents have been, and will continue, to seek the very best, and this will include gender-affirming care as he moved into adolescence. His parents and grandparents alike have expressed concern that if these kinds of treatments are muted here, they will need to move elsewhere for their child's benefit.

Certain legislators in the State of Ohio are seeking to make illegal medical care and practice that have been vital for generations of Ohio families. They are providing a solution and remedy that none of these families are seeking or need. While there are many who have an opinion as to what should be right for everyone, those fires right now are being fed by political winds stoked with hysteria manufactured, at best, by those with narrow understandings of religious faith and, at worst, cynical aims to protect privilege and position.

Given our outstanding colleges and universities, as well as our robust medical resources, Ohio should be a national leader in all forms of medical research and treatment. We could do this if we followed the wisdom of Walt Whitman who encouraged us to be curious, not judgmental. Families with loved ones seeking clarity in regards to gender issues should be coming to Ohio for her world-renowned, cutting-

edged physicians, counselors, research and facilities. This can only be done by building on what has been already gleaned.

Effectively criminalizing seeking answers and direction for parents and children alike at a vulnerable place in their lives would be a horrible mistake, lowering the standard of living for all Ohioans. And from my perspective as a Christian minister, contrary to the testimony you've heard from other Christian leaders, an egregious sin in the eyes of the Lord who called us love our neighbor, particularly the most vulnerable.

I encourage you to not turn HB 68 into law. Protect the health and well-being of all the citizens of our state by continuing to allow them to seek the full-scope of medical and professional counsel for all health matters. I not only submit this statement, but am more than willing to testify in committee.

Respectfully Submitted,
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Senior Pastor
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Father of Aerica, Xavier, Elijah and Toby

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