

Opponent Testimony for HB68
Health Policy Committee
May 24, 2023

Alicia Burkle

Chairperson Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Public Health Policy Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Alicia and my pronouns are she and her. I live in northeast Ohio. Professionally, I am a Program Manager in healthcare and I am also a veteran. Personally, I am the dedicated and incredibly proud mom of two amazing children, Abs who is 15 years old and identifies as gender queer, and Astrid who is 10 years old and is transgender. I am also the wife of an adjunct college professor and National Guard soldier who is currently deployed in Southwest Asia. They are all in support of this testimony today and we are all opposed to House Bill 68.

I have written and re-written this testimony at least a half-dozen times. As a mom, how do I find the right words to somehow convince a committee of strangers that my child's existence is valid? What do I say to convince you that this was not a "choice" my child or my family made? How do I prove to you that my husband and I have done all of the research and have worked closely with Astrid's pediatrician and psychologist to ensure she is getting the best care possible?

Since Astrid was very young, she always gravitated toward dolls instead of trucks, dress-up instead of sports, and all things pink, purple, and glittery. We never thought anything of it, because we never subscribed to the notion that there were "boys toys" and "girls toys" or "boy colors" and "girl colors". As Astrid grew older and found her voice, she started verbalizing to my husband and me that she felt like a girl, and we naively dismissed her and continued to allow her to express herself however she saw fit, with painted nails, sparkly shoes, and pink clothing. Playdates often resulted in Astrid dressed in a Princess costume or tutu, make-up, and high heels. Daycare became preschool, preschool became kindergarten, kindergarten became grade school, and with each passing year, we saw Astrid become more anxious and she became more and more adamant that she was not a boy. We never saw Astrid happier or more confident than when she started truly and fully living as her authentic self. Many of her anxiety symptoms disappeared and we saw a light in her that we had not seen in a few years!

Today, we have a vibrant, social, friendly, musical, gifted, active, 4th grade daughter who is absolutely thriving! She just performed in her first elementary school band concert, sang a solo in her school chorus concert, wrapped up her first musical theater performance, and just received confirmation of a successful audition and acceptance into the Cleveland Orchestra Children's Preparatory Chorus. She just had her first slumber party for her 10th birthday, and if any of you have daughters, you know it was an exhausting night filled with so many giggles! She is truly living her very best life in so many ways!

The only thing causing her any anxiety these days, honestly, is this right here. Having to constantly justify her existence. We have lost family and friends who do not support Astrid. She gets questions from kids at school, mostly just being curious. She is always considering how she is dressed and presenting herself in public to ensure she won't be misgendered. Now, today, instead of participating in field day at school, we are here trying to convince you that her existence is valid.

The idea of being forced to go through male puberty in the next few years is terrifying to my daughter. Visits to the doctor in which someone might have to look at her body cause so much stress. Our care providers have shared the plan of care with us for when Astrid reaches the stage of puberty in which we would consider blockers. We will receive care from a pediatric endocrinologist who will monitor for any risk factors that have been shared with you as the dangers and we will work together to ensure Astrid is receiving safe care. That's how informed consent is supposed to work in healthcare, and when done properly, that's how it does work.

This isn't just our story. This is the story of so many families here in Ohio and across the country who are fighting for the rights of their transgender and gender nonconforming children. We just want our kids to have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. We just want our kids to have the chance to live healthy, happy, and fulfilling lives as their true and authentic selves. Isn't that what every parent wants for their child? Why suddenly is that too much to ask? On behalf of my family and so many others, I urge you to vote NO on House Bill 68. Thank you.