

May 23, 2023

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition to House Bill 68. My name is Catherine Clark* and I am a licensed psychologist in the state of Ohio. My husband, an attorney and proud Clevelander, was born and raised on the Eastside of Cleveland. We have lived together in Northeast Ohio for the past 13 years and are very involved in our school system and local community organizations. We have three daughters - one of which is transgender.

It is with much sadness, disappointment, and worry that I present our family's story to this committee. Because one of our daughters is transgender, my husband and I find ourselves caught in the middle of a political battle that we did not choose nor want to be in - we simply want to live our lives, quietly, like most American families. Our family does not have a political agenda - we do not wish to influence other children or families - we only want to have the freedom and liberty to make informed and educated medical decisions in partnership with health care professionals and experts throughout each of our children's lives.

From the very beginning, our youngest daughter, Nina*, was consistently gender non-conforming and gender creative in dress and play. At around age three, we noticed that Nina was not a stereotypical boy - we regularly observed Nina wanting to wear traditionally feminine clothes and play with more traditional girl toys. During both preschool and kindergarten, Nina would wear "what boys wear" out of concern of being teased. However, once home from school, Nina would change into a dress. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when school switched to an online format, Nina didn't have to wait until the end of the school day to change clothes or express her true self. Instead, Nina was able to be her authentic self all day, everyday. We noted that Nina seemed so happy and free. During this time, Nina also began saying almost every day, "I am a girl but I have a boy's body." and "I am a girl in my heart and brain." With courage, Nina directly expressed wanting to be a girl and asked us to say "she/her" when talking and referring to her. As time went on, Nina shared that she had been hesitant and scared to tell us that she was a girl because she thought we would "feel sad." She told us that she "always knew I was a girl" but since we called her a boy, she thought she needed to "pretend to be a boy."

Since this time, we have met and consulted with our pediatrician, a clinical psychologist and social worker both specializing in gender identity development, and mental health professionals. After much evaluation and reflection, we are accepting that although Nina was

born with anatomy that made us assume she was a boy, she knows herself to be a girl. As her parents, we are wholeheartedly committed to listening to Nina and embracing who she is right now, at this moment. We acknowledge that it is possible her gender identity may change over time; it is also possible that it will not change. Regardless, we are certain of one thing that will never change--our family's unconditional love, support, and acceptance of Nina throughout her life.

As of now, we do not definitively know how things will unfold for Nina as she enters adolescence. We have always planned to take it one day at a time and meet Nina's physical and mental health needs as they arise in consultation with our pediatrician, child psychologist, and other health professionals. The current legislation to ban gender affirming care in the state of Ohio therefore causes us great worry and concern because it would prevent our family from having access to the medical care that Nina might need one day. Since the age of four, Nina has consistently expressed a deep unease with her body and how it might change. She regularly says things like, "I wish I could have a different body." and "I don't want my body to look like Daddy's when I grow up." During these moments, she becomes quite inconsolable and overwhelmed with fear.

Our family simply wants to have access to medical and mental health care that Nina might need one day - health care that is recommended by a team of experienced medical and mental health professionals. We will not make any medical decisions lightly - we will get second opinions, we will evaluate and analyze what is in the best interest of our child - but we should be given that choice and freedom. Just as other parents do in other types of medical decisions involving their children. It feels unethical, inhumane, and un-American to take this right away from us.

We would be devastated if this legislation passes. It could possibly force us to leave our beloved home state of Ohio but more critically, it would deny Ohio families the right to make informed medical choices concerning their children's health, and ultimately cause grave harm to the health and well-being of children like Nina.

I appreciate your time in listening to my testimony. I ask that you vote no on HB 68. I am available for questions.

Sincerely,

Catherine Clark

*pseudonyms used for confidentiality