

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston and members of the Ohio House Public Health Policy Committee, thank you for accepting this written testimony in opposition to House Bill 68.

My name is Danielle Firsich, and I am the Director of Public Policy for Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio and Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio. In 2021, Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio launched gender-affirming care for adults so that non-binary and transgender community can become their authentic and complete selves. Planned Parenthood patients were eager for this care, which is evident by the 544% increase we experienced in gender-affirming care visits last year. We currently offer this care at our Akron, Athens, Franklinton, Kent, Mansfield, and Old Brooklyn Health Centers.

There's no question that gender-affirming care is lifesaving care. Studies show that gender-affirming care is associated with positive effects on body image and lower odds of depression and suicidality for youth and young adults. A 2021 peer-reviewed study published in the Journal of Adolescent Health found that gender-affirming hormone therapy (GAHT) is significantly related to lower rates of depression, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts among transgender and nonbinary youth. For young people under 18, receiving GAHT was associated with nearly 40% lower odds of recent depression and of a past year suicide attempt.

A dangerous and ugly legislative trend emerging over the last couple of years is state restrictions on health care services for trans minors. In 2021, state legislatures across the country introduced more than 100 bills to restrict trans rights, with close to 60 of these bills amounting to health care bans. This trend continued into 2022, with the introduction of more than 100 anti-trans bills, including 52 bills that would limit or entirely ban minors' access to gender affirming care. During the 2023 session so far, more than 115 bills attacking gender affirming care, including 85 all out bans, have been introduced, and four states have banned care for minors. The speed at which legislators have escalated their attacks on trans youth is alarming and devastating. These bills are seeking to undo progress, silence our stories, and erase members in our community. Dehumanization leads to incitement. And incitement leads to violence.

Proponents of these bills believe that banning puberty blockers for minors will prevent minors from making irreversible decisions about their gender identity. However, physicians have explained that banning puberty blockers does not mean that trans youth will be prohibited from making a decision they cannot undo. In fact, the opposite is true. Blockers put puberty on hold so that adolescents have more time to decide what to do next. Without them, bodies undergo physical changes that are difficult if not impossible to reverse, and reversal will often require surgery down the line. With puberty blockers, minors get more time, and are less likely to ultimately need gender-affirming surgery.

Extreme claims that physicians are providing "sex reassignment" to minors without counseling and careful consideration, or are "experimenting on children" are sensationalized claims that only encourage stigma and distrust of trans individuals. It is also offensive to claim that medical professionals provide gender-affirming care to their patients without securing valid informed consent, which in this case would include extensive discussions between the health care provider and their patient. The decision about when and how to provide gender-affirming care should not be made by politicians, but by the individual, in consultation with the medical professionals and counselors who understand their case, and their parents.

This bill is so extreme that it does not make an exception that would allow care for a trans minor whose parents support the minor in their decision to begin gender-affirming care. This bill is so extreme that it does not only deny trans minors gender-affirming care, it then also takes away the ability for trans minors

to get proper mental health support to help them cope with these mental health effects. This amounts to nothing more than cruelty. This bill would deny privacy protections for mental health services, which is an especially cruel tool to use against trans youth. States should be aiming to increase access to high quality mental health services, not making it harder to access.

This is also yet another bill undermining majority rule in this state, while simultaneously upholding government control. This is about the right to freedom. This is about the right to bodily autonomy. Recent polls continue to show that attacks on transgender children and their families are viewed as a major problem in our current social and political landscape, and that this translates across the political spectrum. This is unpopular. This is cruel. And the majority of Americans believe so. If you were true public servants, empowered by the will of the people you represent, you would cease these attacks and create an Ohio that is welcoming of all families, and their right to both exist and flourish. The idea that so-called “parental rights” are only for a select minority of parents, and not equally reserved for those that love and support their LGBTQ+ kids, is deeply problematic and offensive at best.

This extreme “parental rights” movement ignores and undermines the necessarily separate *rights of the child*, rights explicitly laid out in The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child--an international human rights treaty introduced 33 years ago that remains the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world. Parents have responsibilities. And they have power. Power that does not and should not wholly eclipse the rights and dignity of their own children. Ultimately, decisions about what care is appropriate should be a decision made by an individual with their parents or guardians and trusted health care providers, not the government.

Allow me to pose a hypothetical question to you. If you were desperately in need of a medical treatment that had a 97.5% success rate, would you take it? Or would you not only refuse the treatment, *but deny its access to others*, based on your personal fear of the remote possibility that it wouldn't benefit or save *your* life? That is how absurd it sounds when we allow these conversations to revolve around the 2.5% of trans people who decide to no longer pursue gender-affirming care. That is their right. Just as it is the right of the 97.5% to access the care they need to be wholly and truly themselves. People of all gender identities deserve civil and human rights, including the right to high-quality, affordable, and nonjudgmental health care and accurate information about their health care options.

De-transitioning is exceptionally rare, and often occurs not because individuals no longer believe they need hormonal therapy, but because they are lacking support and validation in other aspects of their life or experiencing extensive discrimination or adversity that they are not yet prepared for. Repeatedly quoting debunked studies conducted by problematic and unethical medical researchers who had their clinics closed due to the methodological errors of their research is both unhelpful and dangerous. There are a plentiful multitude of actual research studies you could be examining that prove the efficacy and necessity of gender-affirming care, but you refuse to uplift them because they do not serve your narrow ideological purpose.

I can confidently tell you that we at Planned Parenthood will continue to dare to be bold visionaries, reimagining what is possible for the communities we serve. Our vision for the future is a joyful one where all Ohioans receive the care they need to live empowered, fulfilling, and authentic lives.

My partner and I are raising a trans teenager. A teenager we almost lost, because the pain of waking up each day before accessing affirming and life-saving medical care outweighed his will to exist. I refuse to

entertain the possibility of losing that child. I refuse to be complicit in his absolute erasure and degradation. To that kid at home, and all other trans youth across this state—I see you. I hear you. I stand with you. You are valid. You are worthy. You are valued. I love you, in all your uniqueness, courage, resilience, unapologetic authenticity, and beauty. Thank you for waking up each day and living your truth. May we one day create a world that is deserving of you.

Thank you, and I will now take any questions you may have.