

## Opponent Testimony for HB68

### House Public Health Policy Committee

5/24/2023

Natalie Flanagan

Citizen

Thank you, Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, and Ranking Member Liston for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Natalie Flanagan. I'm an Ohioan by birth and a Toledoan by the grace of God. I presently live in Athens for college. I'm an Ohioan through and through, and the actions of this legislature will always be personal to me.

I'm not just an Ohioan, I am a transgender Ohioan. Around age 10, one day everything clicked. I knew who I was and who I ought to be. I'd never met a transgender person. Nobody talked to me about them in school. This was before *Obergefell*, so it wasn't even really in the public consciousness. For the next couple of years, I struggled to admit it to myself, debated telling my parents and peers, and tried to cope with the intense gender dysphoria all at once. The difficulty of even telling my parents kept me awake at night.

It wasn't until I was 15 that I finally decided to say something to my parents. This was during September of my Sophomore year of high school. At this point, I had switched from public schooling to an all-boys Catholic high school. I told my folks that I was transgender, and not knowing what to do, they decided the best thing was to keep things the way they were until I was an adult.

I fell into a spiral. I didn't have anyone to talk to about it except a few friends. I developed a habit of self-harm, and I became increasingly suicidal. I learned how to tie a noose. A few months later, after I had mentioned my suicidal ideation to a friend, who decided it was in my best interest if I were to go to the hospital. They also decided that I did not get a choice. I had already gotten in bed that night, I remember I first heard the sirens, then the dispatcher called me. Then I walked out into the living room to see the devastated look on my parents' faces. I remember telling them that they were here for me. I remember getting patted down, my neighbors standing in the windows watching the whole scene, and getting put in the back of a squad car to be taken to St. Charles Hospital.

They let me out, and in a few days, I had a therapist. God bless my therapist. My first session, I told her that I did not expect to live until the end of high school. From there began a long journey of coping with everything I had struggled with. If it were not for my therapist and my ability to

talk about my issues with gender with her, I would have killed myself. Your bill could potentially block this kind of care.

I coped, but Lord knows how hard it was. Every day, my intrusive thoughts would whirl. I would freeze up in class thinking about it. I would answer a question, and the sound of my deep voice would send me into panic. My suicidal thoughts would kick in. I would gaze at the window and think about getting up and jumping out. I could never focus on my schoolwork or homework because all I had were aggressive and angry thoughts about my identity and the fear that society, my friends, my family wouldn't accept me.

I've been on hormones for over a year and a half as an adult, and I'm the happiest I've ever been in my life. I wish that the younger me could see me now and know that everything ended up okay. Gender-affirming care has saved my life.

This bill worries me because of certain provisions. I'm very concerned about Sec. 3129.03. Had this bill been law when I was growing up, who knows where I would be? I've said previously, the affirming therapy that I had saved my life. What if my mom or my dad declined for me to be affirmed and I was forced to try and desist? I can only shudder at the thought.

I'm asking you to keep big government out of the lives of Ohioans like myself, my family, and thousands of other families across this state. You must leave the door open.

These are the lives of our kids we're talking about. Representative Click has said that this bill is written by special interests. He said in the initial hearing in the last legislature that the Centers for Christian Virtue asked him to carry this bill. The proponent testimony was full of out-of-staters. We must do what's best for Ohio and Ohio's families.

I lived to tell my story, but if this bill passes, trans kids from across this state, from Miamisburg to Ashville to New Richmond to Bainbridge to Nashport to Celina to Kettering, will resent their government and go somewhere they're welcome—if they can even stay alive long enough. I encourage the members of the committee to think about those kids and their parents, and vote no on this bill. Thank you.