

Opponent Testimony for HB 68
OHR Public Health Policy Committee
May 24, 2023

Carrie Frederick, Licensed Professional School Counselor

Chairman Lipps, Representative Click, and members of the House Public Health Policy Committee:

My name is Carrie Frederick (he/him/they). I am a licensed professional school counselor currently working in Columbus City Schools. Today, I write in my capacity as an advocate for Ohio's youth, including some of our most marginalized youth, to ask you to oppose HB 68.

HB 68 is not in the best interest of Ohio's transgender youth. It presents a false narrative about the type of treatment transgender youth receive, under the guise of "protecting" children from a non-existent threat.

The reality is that when transgender youth are supported, including having access to the appropriate mental health and medical care, they thrive. When those options are taken away, these same youth are at greater risk for depression, anxiety, risky behaviors, homelessness, and suicide.

HB 68 is in direct conflict to the researched best practices of every relevant body, including the American Medical Association (AMA), the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Organizations such as GLSEN and the Trevor Project have gathered data surrounding LGBTQ+ youth, including transgender youth, for decades. All of these organizations agree that allowing minors the autonomy to be themselves is in their best interest.

I have worked closely with students in several Ohio counties. At all of these schools, and across grade levels, I have worked with transgender youth. Some of these students came to me from the position of being "out" as transgender for years, while others were still working through the process. Some of these students came from homes with unwavering family support. Some had been kicked out of their home because of their gender identity. Most, however, were on a spectrum in between, with at least some family support, and where everyone, student and guardians alike, were working to understand their options.

While ideally every child has support at home, not all do. While their support may be from family members, for many it comes from clergy or school staff, or another supportive adult in their life. HB 68 would require sharing private information that can and does put some children in danger. Every transgender student I have worked with has wanted to "come out" to their parent or guardians. Most were actively working on their plan to do so, but only when they felt safe to share that information.

Gender transition looks different for everyone. For the majority of transgender minors, it means changing their name and pronouns, while updating their hairstyle and wardrobe to better reflect their gender. For those who are receiving medical interventions, that is already only happening with the consent of their parents or legal guardians. It is happening within the researched guidelines of the aforementioned bodies. And to be clear, the medical interventions these students receive may start with puberty blockers at an appropriate time. Most minors will not receive hormone replacement therapy (HRT), and must wait until turning 18 to access it. There are almost no gender affirming surgeries performed on transgender minors (while no one is targeting cosmetic surgeries performed on cisgender* minors). The picture being painted of children being “tricked” into irreversible medical decisions is a blatant lie.

The consistent truth is that transgender students who experience support are more successful, including at school. The number of transgender students is small, but they still deserve to be treated with respect. I have witnessed time and again these students blossom when they are spoken to with the correct name and pronoun, when the adults in their life recognize them for who they are. These students need to know they can trust these adults to support them, including not “outing” them prematurely to people who may abuse them or kick them out of a home if this truth is shared. HB 68 will force school staff and medical professionals to do just that.

Unfortunately, I have witnessed children who are not allowed to be their authentic gender withdraw, lose housing, and drop out of high school because of the undue stress on their mental health. Alternately, when transgender children are allowed to exist in the ways that are authentic to them, I have witnessed them become more socially involved and improve their grades. They apply to college programs and start planning for their futures. They get to be kids and teenagers, just like their peers.

I urge you to stop buying into the fear mongering and hate directed at Ohio’s transgender citizens, and particularly at our transgender youth. Please OPPOSE HB 68.

Thank you.

*Cisgender is a term that means not transgender