



Public Health Policy Committee
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215
OHRPublicHealthPolicyCommittee@ohiohouse.gov

TransOhio, Inc.
P.O. Box 18272
Cleveland, Ohio 44118
transohio@transohio.org

May 24, 2023

RE: HB 68 "SAFE" act or the trans youth medical ban - *oppositional testimony*

Dear Hon. Chair Lipps and respected Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on this important issue. My name is James Knapp. I'm an attorney in the northeast Ohio area, and I have the pleasure to serve as Board of Directors of TransOhio, Ohio's first state-wide transgender equality organization.

Founded in 2005, TransOhio is a 501(C)(3) comprised entirely of volunteers dedicated to education, advocacy, support, and providing community to trans people and their allies. TransOhio has worked with local, state, and national efforts to draft and update policies related to transgender people, such as nondiscrimination ordinances, employee policies, student handbooks, etc. We've spoken with school districts, educators, student clubs, and interest groups. TransOhio has provided educational trainings to church groups, civil groups, corporate employees, volunteers, providers, and allies. Along with our community partners, we also host the Ohio Name Change Legal Clinic, which helps trans folks and their parents better understand the legal process of changing identity documents. TransOhio will host the annual Trans & Ally Symposium, now in its 14th year, in northeast Ohio this upcoming September to help foster community and to better educate allies of the greater trans communities. We encourage you to attend; you might learn something. At least one workshop will focus on an honest discussion of HB68 and the other anti-trans legislation that has been introduced in Ohio.

TransOhio opposes restricting access to medical care based on a patient's "transgender status." Under HB68, the best interest of a minor transgender patient is irrelevant so long as they do not receive any treatment that is gender-affirming. The consent or wishes of the parents, also irrelevant. And worse, it doesn't matter if the patient had already started a course of treatment. They would be required to stop, despite the resulting negative side effects including mental anguish. Any physician would be guilty of a crime if he or she recommended a referral out-of-state, which is common practice.

It should be noted though, that nonconsensual, irreversible surgeries on intersex infants, toddlers, and children is not affected by this bill. The use of puberty-blockers for cisgender children with precocious puberty (which is on the rise, but is still a population smaller than trans and



non-binary youth) is not affected. This bill specifically targets and seeks to harm trans youth by implying that being transgender is “the real harm.” We assure you, it is not. There are already too many anecdotal stories told by trans, non-binary, and gender nonconforming people in Ohio about how they were mistreated in a medical context. This bill will not just encourage mistreatment; it will require it. Despite WPATH standards of care, area best practices, and the guidance of every single medical association in the United States, medical professionals in Ohio will be unable to treat transgender patients. This will have a devastating effect on countless families.

We urge you to remember the trans people, including youth, who have tragically lost their lives due to inappropriate care or no care whatsoever.

At 2:30am on December 28, 2014, Leelah Alcorn, a 17 year old girl in Ohio, took her own life.

She had come out to her parents as transgender, asking to see doctors and psychologists who could work with her and them. Her parents refused to take her to legitimate doctors and therapists for the best evidence-based care. Instead, they isolated her and forced her to see a Christian “therapist” to undergo conversion therapy – a discredited practice outlawed in many states and condemned by the American Psychology Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Medical Association.

Leelah told friends she came out to her parents and described their reaction. “They felt like I was attacking their image, and that I was an embarrassment to them. They wanted me to be their perfect little straight Christian boy, and that’s obviously not what I wanted.”

After months of isolation and “therapy” she wrote “I have decided I’ve had enough. There’s no winning. There’s no way out. I’m sad enough already, I don’t need my life to get any worse. People say “it gets better” but that isn’t true in my case. It gets worse. Each day I get worse. That’s the gist of it, that’s why I feel like killing myself. Sorry if that’s not a good enough reason for you, it’s good enough for me.”

Ohio has introduced a ban on transgender healthcare before. It’s clear that law makers intended to codify what was done to Leelah into law. They want to criminalize medical care and force others to eliminate transgender people from society. They don’t seem to care about misery and death that will result — in fact, that seems to be the goal.

Gender-Affirming Care is a collaborative effort with trans individuals through a number of interventions (social, legal, medical, behavioral, surgical) designed to holistically address their well-being through peer involved processes to:

- improve social, psychological, behavioral, and medical health,
- provide respectful support and affirmation of their self-attested gender identity,
- ensure inclusion and use of trauma-informed and harm reduction principles, and
- provide a welcoming, inviting health care setting, regardless of size of practice, in conjunction with their doctors and their personal support system.



Gender-affirming care is common practice for cisgender people, and it should be for trans people as well. We urge you to **vote no**. *Stand up for patient rights*. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact us with any questions. We welcome further discussion.

Respectfully submitted,
TransOhio Board of Directors

James C. Knapp, Esq.