

Dear Chair and Public Health Policy Committee,

I am writing to oppose H.B. 68 because it will not protect our youth, but instead will lead to increased harm in patients who do not identify with their assigned gender at birth.

HB 68, the "SAFE Act," would harm the safety and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth across Ohio. Please do not support this bill and vote no if it comes up for a vote. Gender affirming care saves lives.

According to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and World Health Organization gender affirming care encompasses biological, psychological, behavioral, and social aspects of health. A 2017 study out of the University of Minnesota found that 61% of transgender youth had suicidal ideation. By restricting further access to medical care, we are jeopardizing the lives of children across Ohio. Our youth should have access to doctors and other health professionals who can help them through difficult developmental times with an open mind and connections to mental health resources that fall under gender-affirming care.

This bill would prohibit mental health providers from diagnosing and treating minors without the consent of the patient's legal guardian. Mental health support is a life-saving intervention for youth of all backgrounds and identities. The foundation of counseling is built on trust between the patient and provider. Unless anyone's life is at risk, we must respect the sanctity of health care professionals and patient confidentiality. By removing this safe outlet for patients, we are doing a disservice to our youth, and this will lead to increased harm.

We must protect our children and ensure that they have access to best-practice physical and mental health treatment, including LGBTQ+ Youth. HB 68 directly puts already vulnerable LGBTQ+ youth at risk of losing access to vital, best-practice healthcare, including mental health care, and forcibly re-transition all transgender youth in the state of Ohio. This legislation would upend the lives of Ohio families, many of which would be forced to flee the state to protect their children.

The so-called SAFE Act isn't safe. Restricting gender affirming care will further alienate children who need additional support by the healthcare system. This is dangerous for Ohio youth.

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<https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/what-gender-affirming-care-your-questions-answered>