

**Opponent Testimony for House Bill Number 68**  
**House Public Health Policy Committee**  
**May 24th 2023**

**Siarra Powers, Early Childhood Educator**

Chairman Lipps, Representative Click, and members of the House Public Health Policy Committee I would like to thank you for allowing me to testify today and taking time to hear the concerns I have about House Bill 68. My name is Siarra Powers, and I am an early childhood educator with over a decade of experience teaching and working with children as young as 6 weeks up to the the ages of 12 years old. I have worked in several preschools, church youth programs, and childcare centers around our state of Ohio, and I have always taken my role as an advocate for children and caretaker of our communities, children, and families very seriously. Upon reading this bill I was immediately concerned about the disrespect to and invasion of privacy into the lives of transgender children and their families. As a caretaker of children I can understand that all of us are concerned for the long term physical and mental health of all children, however this bill raises many points that I and many others are terrified will be detrimental to the happiness and safety of so many transgender children and their families. In particular I will be addressing the topics of mandated reporting, limitations on services to families who rely on medicaid, and the issues related to relying solely on custodial guardians to dictate the care of their transgender children.

I have worked with a handful of transgender children in my years of teaching, and have also worked with several children who had siblings and parents who are transgender as well. I have wiped tears and cleaned boo boos from young children who were bullied in our schools simply for trying to be true to themselves. I have held the hands of parents who live a life of fear for the future of their children as they shared their stories, fears, and worries with me. I listen to their stories and struggle to keep composure or find words of hope to give them because while a kiss and a bandaid is sufficient to handle a preschool or elementary schoolers physical wounds for today, they were not quite as useful when it came to the young adult who I considered a college peer who was beaten so severely on one of our local community college campuses they had to be hospitalized after losing conscience. This poor transgender woman's face is the face I see when I look into the eyes of my transgender students, into their parents and sibling's eyes, her face is what I thought about while I was reading this bill. She was beaten because after months of bullying and harassment on our campus and little to no help from school faculty she finally spoke up and said "Hey, can't you just leave me alone?". This simple plea for respect, and human decency, and to be simply left to live her life and attend school and pursue her hopes and dreams was too much to ask and she was beaten by several men right on my campus. This is the future I fear for more and more transgender children and citizens as I read through this bill.

Taking away transgender citizens' rights to privacy in healthcare as we are all entitled to open the doors into treating transgender citizens as “less than” as we are beginning to strip basic rights away from this group simply because we are worried that we can not trust them to pursue adequate and appropriate health care for themselves. You are saying “I know what's best for you, you need me to watch over you.”. Many people I know who are pro this bill would be outraged to report to the state annually about their health, mental health, and especially to have the state deem what medical treatment they are allowed and not allowed to pursue. We might be starting with children, but I have no doubts this bill will cause a domino effect into analyzing the rights of all transgender citizens. Many of these children you are claiming to be protecting with this bill will now have their identity and care be concerns in custodial battles with family, or be forced to solely rely on custodial guardians to decide their course of therapy and treatments with again mandated reporting from mental health professionals, and sadly this is frequently not a safe option for children. It is not only peers and strangers who are dangerous to transgender children, many of these children live in fear in their own homes and will now lose safe options to discuss their needs and concerns as they are realizing who they truly are. Limiting the use of medicaid says “If you are low income your happiness is not a priority”, and “We as a state do not recognize this as a legitimate health care need”. The bills addresses some of the alarming rates of suicide in the transgender youth community, and I can not plead with you enough to really and honestly consider which way this bill will actually tip the statistics on this sad reality because I think we all know the numbers will only grow as children and families lose trust, safety, respect, and support from their already small and limited options and networks.

I am grateful to you for listening to my concerns and pleas with you to vote no on bill 68 today , because as is written I truly believe this bill will put all of our state's transgender children at many risks and I hope you will not take your votes and choices today lightly.

Thank you.