

Ohio House Public Health Policy Committee
Opponent Testimony on H. B. No. 68
Hannah Schwab
May 24, 2023

Chairperson Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and committee members. Thank you for allowing me to provide my testimony in opposition to House Bill 68 that would ban life-saving health care for transgender and gender nonconforming children.

My name is Hannah Schwab, I use she/they pronouns, and I have lived my entire life here in Ohio. I grew up in northern Ohio, I attended college in Cleveland, and began my professional career here in Columbus, where I have lived for the past 10 years. Yet, despite being a proud Ohioan all these years, this state I've considered my home, my safety, my community, is turning its back on me.

See, I am a transgender woman, and - like many transgender and gender nonconforming people - I have been denied access to gender-affirming healthcare. In 2019 I was denied by insurance twice for a procedure I was continually reassured would be covered.

After meeting with my healthcare providers in 2019, we set a goal for care later that year. The months that followed were some of the most difficult moments of my life. After getting the paperwork I needed, I submitted everything to insurance, waiting patiently for the call saying I was approved. But that call didn't arrive. I was denied. It hurt, sure, but they told me I just needed another letter. Just one more. So I got another...and I was denied again. I was devastated. Something I had been so excited for - my life to get back on track - and here it was being taken from me again. I cried; sobbing on my bedroom floor. Inconsolable, I felt this procedure would never happen for me. The following is a quote from my journal outlining how it felt to be denied:

From 23 April 2019: "I've spent most of my life thinking transition could never happen for me. Now, at 28, I've transitioned socially with the dream of transitioning my body physically. I'm so so close and yet...after all of that, it was ripped away from me in an instant. Again I am left feeling like this is impossible for me. A peace with myself I will never achieve. I was just so close."

Mine is not a unique story, but one of many. Most trans/gender nonconforming people experience great difficulty in trying to access healthcare, often made to feel like outsiders or that we don't belong. That access today is even more difficult for transgender/gender nonconforming kids. I have had the pleasure of knowing many parents of transgender kids. Sadly, all of whom live in fear of a bill like HB 68.

One parent contacted me in 2022 looking for help getting approval from insurance for their child's gender-affirming care. In the months and years before I met them, this child had been hospitalized multiple times for suicidal ideation. Countless times their parents had pulled them off the floor sobbing because of how they felt about their body. Now, at 17 years-old, this child was seeking top surgery to finally feel like themselves. Unfortunately, despite having 4 letters from different providers of varying fields (primary care, mental health, surgery, even cardiology), their claims were denied. When told they would have to wait until 18 to receive the care they needed, this child told their mother, "I won't make it to 18". Eventually, we were able to push back, using the World Professional Association for Transgender Health Standards of Care to secure this child the care they needed. Now, over a year later, they have

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received over \$300,000 in scholarship offers and will be attending college in the fall. I cannot express how proud I am of this child.

Hb 68 is intentional in the way it discriminates against the transgender community, and it is in blatant opposition to the advice of the overwhelming majority of the medical community. Discrimination is a major concern parents have for their trans kids. Some worry about the impact this bill will have on inclusion in schools. Trans/non-binary students in schools experience bullying at a much higher rate than cisgender (or non-transgender) students. I've heard from parents whose children have been forced to the ground and kicked/beaten by other students who shout transphobic slurs; only for administrators to say "oh well, kids will be kids". Transgender kids today have been forced to become expert self-advocates when they have teachers, coaches, students, and more actively excluding and discriminating against them.

Gender-affirming care and affirming providers may be the only respite transgender kids have from the onslaught of bullying and discrimination they experience on a daily basis. HB 68 will eliminate that safe haven and normalize the transphobia and discrimination transgender/gender nonconforming kids experience everyday. Furthermore, "Watchful Waiting" is an incredibly harmful practice when it comes to the healthcare needs of transgender/gender nonconforming children. This isn't just a claim. It's a conclusion backed by research as well as the American Academy of Pediatrics.

If this bill is passed, it WILL result in the deaths of transgender/gender nonconforming children. If this bill is passed, I don't know how I will be able to respond to a parent whose child is on the brink of suicide due to lack of access to care.

Not every transgender person is suicidal, but many are. HB 68 will take care away from the kids that are struggling, forcing them to remain in agony in the hopes they'll be able to survive long enough to see the day they can finally access the care they need. Speaking from experience, that wait feels daunting and hopeless. This bill completely ignores not only the advice of the medical community, but the very real and dire outcomes for the kids that need gender-affirming care. It's also worth pointing out, in other states that have passed similar legislation, healthcare providers have stopped providing this care for all transgender and gender nonconforming people, regardless of age. Whether it's stated explicitly or not, this bill may end up stripping away access to care for all transgender Ohioans.

Committee members, you all have the opportunity to ensure that transgender/gender nonconforming people have access to the care and safe spaces we need to live and thrive as our true selves. So I implore you, be the hero we need. Vote NO on HB 68. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.