

Gender-Affirming Care and Young People

I. BACKGROUND:

Hello, my name is Danielle Schultz, and I am from Akron, Ohio. My husband and I are proud parents to two young adult daughters and a teenage son. I am a stay-at-home mom with a Master's in Education, and my husband is a law professor at University of Akron Law School. I am here to respectfully request that you reject HB68.

Before I continue, I want to make it clear that my son approves of my testifying publicly -- and is mature enough to make that decision.

Our son came out as transgender 5 years ago, in 2018, when he was 12. I was shocked and regret how I handled it. I focused on *how society would treat him* and on *understanding why he was trans*. Parenting is humbling though, and educational! While assessing serious decisions, I've learned to ask, "What if I'm wrong?" It helps me look at an issue from new perspectives. In this case it helped me refocus on what my son needs: to be supported and appreciated for who he is. He needs *autonomy* to be his own person. And he needs me to rebuild the trust that he had in me that first day he told me he was a boy.

So he needs gender affirming care, including the medical care that HB68 seeks to ban. Now my husband and I make decisions about our son's medical care in consultation with doctors, therapists, and our child.

Maybe someone can learn from my mistake though. As to the "why," my son is trans: I can tell you with certainty that my strict one hour of screen time per day (which included only parent-approved shows and games) did not cause our son to be transgender. Nor did friends or societal trends. No outside force causes a person to be transgender. Gender identity is personal and *needs no justification*. Our son just is who he is-- a caring, funny, wise-beyond-his years boy. We are so proud of him.

And he's doing great. Our son is active in community service and has nice friends. He graduated a year early from high school and is attending college in the fall.

II. DEFINING GENDER AFFIRMING CARE

The Department of Health and Human Services defines gender affirming care as non-medical and medical services that allow a person to live as their true gender.

(<https://opa.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2022-03/gender-affirming-care-young-people-march-2022.pdf>)

As a parent, I needed to learn all about all three components of care:

1. Social Affirmation - My son could transition socially at any age, which for him meant expressing his gender through his appearance, his new name and pronouns, and by participating in some more-typically male activities.

2. Mental Health Care - I learned that a gender affirming adolescent psychologist supports a child's *exploration* of gender identity. The child may realize they are cisgender, transgender, or gender expansive. A trans child might receive a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, which is when a person feels severe distress because the gender assigned at birth doesn't match their gender identity. A good counselor also helps transgender children navigate our phobic culture. Finally, parents of trans children learn how to support their child's journey.

3. Medical Health Care - *Children and adolescents do not currently receive any gender affirming medical care without the consent and cooperation of their parents.* Even with parental consent, there is a long process of medical tests and doctors' and therapists' approval before a teenager can begin taking medicine. HB68 would deny parents' ability to make medical decisions for their own child and replace expert doctors with state control.

Regarding Gender-Affirming Surgeries: Children don't have surgery. It takes years of therapy and relationships with expert doctors before trans *adults* can have surgery. Few doctors would even consider surgery for a minor.

III. GENDER AFFIRMING MEDICAL CARE IS A FORM OF WELLNESS CARE.

I know this isn't a perfect comparison, but this idea helped me. I consider adolescent gender affirming medical care for to be part of basic wellness care. And wellness care saves lives. For example, a person with asthma or gender dysphoria isn't ill, but they do need preventive care to live a healthy life. In each case, they might need medicine for their body to function properly. And in both cases, denying medical care is life threatening.

In conclusion, those who support HB68, please ask yourself, "what if I am wrong? What if HB68 passes out of this Committee, eventually becomes law, and I am wrong about its effect?"

Because this bill denies children life-saving medical care. And you will be responsible for their harm.

Please reject HB68.