

Written Testimony, Ohio HB68

May 24, 2023

Chair Lipps, Vice-Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Public Health Policy Committee,

My name is Rachel Ernst Stahlhut and my pronouns are she/her. I'm a proud Cincinnati, a Quaker, a mother of a transgender seven-year-old. I was raised on the west side of Cincinnati and when I married a nice guy from Indiana, I brought him back to Ohio with me to build our life together. I strongly oppose House Bill 68, the proposed ban on gender-affirming care for minors in Ohio.

Our child is seven. Tomorrow is her last day of second grade. She transitioned during kindergarten, which was the year that schools were shut down due to Covid. I remember that she would unmute herself during her online kindergarten classes and proudly shout, "I'm a girl!" to her classmates. She was happy to be known as her true self, and has been a confident, smart, independent, sassy little girl since. She is still young, but she knows about puberty and is very clear that she does NOT want to grow a beard or have her body changed by male puberty. We have promised her that there are doctors and experts who will help her as she grows up so that she will be able to live as the girl she knows herself to be. In fact, we've already had two visits with the Transgender Health Clinic at Cincinnati Children's Hospital and we have made the informed decision to pursue gender affirming medical care when the time comes.

Last year I saw a Facebook post by another parent of a transgender kid who told her child, "*We are building a new world and I will be with you every step of the way.*" This phrase has grounded me as I've faced the challenges of raising a gender-diverse kid. "*We are building a new world and I will be with you every step of the way.*"

Lately, though, I've come to recognize that, in so many ways, we are *already* living in this new world. There are gender clinics all over the country with a solid history of successful and well-researched care. It's common for people to introduce themselves with their pronouns or to hang pride flags from their porches. Young people are incredibly accepting and affirming, and recent studies show that 20% of Gen Z identifies as LGBTQIA+¹. My daughter's social transition has gone well at school and daycare, with friends and family, and in our Quaker meeting and our neighborhood. And in OUR HOME, *we have built and are already living in the new world*. Our home is governed by love, laughter, affirmation, fierce unconditional support, and trans joy. Every April 13th we celebrate Daughter Day, the day our family was blessed with a daughter (also the day I finally went to Target and bought some pink shirts with strawberries on them).

My child is sweet and loving and sensitive and optimistic about the world. How should I tell her that lawmakers want to deny her her true identity as she grows into adolescence? As a parent, I have always aimed to be truthful, but I didn't tell her why I was coming here today. What would you say to my seven-year-old if she was in the room right now? "Sweetie, there are some grown-ups in the government who think you're a boy and that you should grow up to be a boy?" This would be absurd to her, and also very hurtful. Remember that new world I was talking about? My daughter already lives there. She is affirmed and loved and thriving. She knows herself. Who she grows up to be is up to her. My role as her parent is to keep her safe and to use my adult wisdom and experience to make informed medical

¹ <https://www.axios.com/2022/02/17/lgbtq-generation-z-gallup>

decisions on her behalf. Her father and I are the best people to make these decisions – NOT Ohio legislators. House Bill 68 strips us and other Ohio families of this right and freedom, and it does not keep my child safe.

You as elected lawmakers are responsible for representing *all* Ohioans. As you consider voting for this bill, I urge you to think about an amazing seven-year-old girl from Cincinnati, and all of the other kids throughout the state who trust the adults in their lives to keep them safe and walk alongside them into the new world. I urge you to vote NO on HB68.