



**House Public Health Policy Committee
HB 68 - Opponent Testimony
05/24/2023**

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Good morning, Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Public Policy Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio in opposition of House Bill 68, regarding gender affirming care for minors in Ohio.

CDF-Ohio is a statewide non-profit organization which serves as an independent voice for all children. Born out of the civil rights movement, with more than four decades of advocacy in Ohio, it is the mission of the Children's Defense Fund to champion policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse and neglect, and ensure their access to quality health care, quality education, and nutritional wellness.

Bills like HB68, that restrict the type of medical care minors and their parents can access, have been introduced in states around the country. Laws banning gender-affirming care are on hold in Alabama, Arizona, Oklahoma, and Texas after judges blocked enforcement. These bills represent huge legislative, parental, and medical overreach. Legislators should not be in the business of making medical decisions, and they should not come between a child and access to care the child's parents, in consultation with their doctor, feel is in the child's best interest.



Every major medical organization, including the American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, the Endocrine Society, American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association, and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, among others, have issued statements recognizing the medical necessity and appropriateness of gender affirming care for youth, often remarking on the harmful effects of denying access to these services.

These child health experts recognize that gender affirming care is health care and that access to this care saves lives.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, state policies restricting youth access to gender affirming care could have significant health and other implications for LGBTQ+ youth, their parents, and health care providers. LGBTQ+ youth experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidality than their non-LGBTQ+ peers. In fact, data from the most recent [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention shows that in 2021 more than 20% of LGBTQ+ students attempted suicide and were overall more likely to experience poor mental health and suicidal thoughts and behaviors than their peers. Inability to access gender affirming care has been linked to worse mental health outcomes for transgender youth and would make these already tragic trends far worse when we should – and could – be supporting life-affirming and supportive policies to improve them.

Ohio is in the middle of a mental health crisis. One in five children in Ohio struggle with mental health. Legislation like HB68 will further exacerbate this crisis by prohibiting the counseling and treatment children and their parents are seeking. When this bill was introduced in the last General Assembly, we heard testimony from physicians from Children's Hospitals around the state who spoke to the established standards of care, careful conversations, shared decision making, and extensive counseling that are all part of gender affirming care in Ohio.



As in any area of medicine, the best evidence-based care for treating health conditions comes from established standards of care, not from politicians trying to restrict the rights of parents and children to access needed care. Our most vulnerable children will pay the heaviest price for lawmakers' efforts to control, limit, or ban gender-affirming care.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to HB68 – we urge you to reject this harmful bill.