

May 24, 2023

**House Committee on Public Health Policy - Chairman Lipps
Written Testimony in Opposition to H.B.68**

Good morning, Chairman Lipps, Ranking Member Liston, Representative Somani, my District 11 representative. My name is Chris Ward. I am a widowed father of two children. My wife, Wendy, died of breast cancer at age 32. I am a resident of Hilliard, a graduate of the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law. My oldest son is transgender.

I have experienced firsthand the tears, heartache, uncertainty and terror of watching my child struggle with gender identity amidst the vocal condemnation of those who are hostile to those who are different. I have also experienced the joy and hope that can come from acceptance, affirming and simple acknowledgement of his struggle and his worth as a person.

I want to briefly tell you our story of struggle and what this bill would have done to my family and what it could do to others. My son struggled for years through depression, anxiety, cutting, panic attacks, physical and emotional exhaustion and suicidal thoughts and plans. Through middle school and into the start of high school, we worked to find help, through therapy, medications, different activities in hope to bring joy and peace. Our whole lives were on a knife's-edge. Imagine yourself in the Emergency Room - as I was multiple times - after learning your child has the thought and the plan to kill himself.

In hindsight now, it was always there. The signs were there from early years that my son did not feel right presenting to the world as a girl. And I have to live with the guilt of all those times I should have realized and helped with the real issue. But when my son told me he was transgender as a freshman in high school, we finally started the process of getting the care that would actually help.

What saved my son's life? It was the combined efforts of my son, me and our mental health and medical professionals talking, learning, listening, supporting and taking affirming steps. Representative Click's Bill would have prevented that. This Bill would harm my family and interfere in the medical decisions that me, my son and our doctors make. Here is how it goes for families like mine - weeks and months of reading, learning, listening, crying, hugging. Two therapists, a psychiatrist, our pediatrician, our pediatric gynecologist. Medications, diagnostic scans, evaluations. Baby steps into social transition with his name, pronouns, hair, clothes, a binder. Every day was an effort, a struggle, a journey of love to create a world where my son could be himself and want to live a life.

But the struggles continued - we were missing days of school, we had to remove the mirrors from the house as my son feels pain seeing himself in a way that does not feel right. But after taking all the steps outlined in the WPATH and the APA's plans on gender affirming care, including achieving a psychologically stable place with written support from our mental health professionals, we found a provider and starting the medical portion of gender affirming care. It was starting hormone therapy which finally turned the tide. It saved my son's life. Before I was afraid of whether we would make it through the day. But then when we would walk out of the doctor's office, I could see the change. The hope, the smile, the gratefulness that someone listened, cared, helped. These therapists and doctors - their livelihoods attacks in this Bill, honestly loved and cared for my child. To say their interest in doing so was financial or ideological is disgusting.

I will leave it to other witnesses to testify about all the inaccuracies in Rep. Click's testimony and FAQs. But as a Dad who has exhaustively read everything I can get my hands on about gender-affirming care:

- when he says 85-95% of children with gender dysphoria "desist" as they go through puberty, he is flat out wrong. This stat keeps getting parroted again and again by those like Rep. Click - based on a 2011 study riddled with errors and discredited. The real number is like 2%.
- when he says being trans is a trend or social media contagion, he is wrong. He is talking about a ridiculous and debunked study by Littman. The pain and struggle I saw in my child's eyes eliminated immediately and without question any notion that this journey was anything but genuine.
- when he says children now just know all they have to do is "claim suicide" and they will get what they want like a kid wanting a candy bar in the check-out line - I am insulted. This is life or death here for kids and parents and when Rep. Click says "what is the harm in waiting" - the harm in my family would have been absolutely devastating.

When Rep. Click says he is not coming for trans adults, parents like me know better. You are coming for my trans child now. And like in Oklahoma, and other states where anti-trans attacks continue where Ohio follows, we all know you are coming for adults next and will do whatever you can to prevent my son from getting this care when he turns 18. The goal here is not protection. The goal is erasure. Erasing trans kids from existence now, and adults next.

Transgender youth and their families see and feel this attack. They feel the dehumanization. And I will not stop defending my son, and all those transgender youth just trying to live, survive and hope for a future of acceptance. They deserve the freedom, privacy and dignity to make their medical decisions with their families and medical providers.

I urge this Committee to emphatically reject this piece of legislation. Thank you.