

Ohio House Public Health Policy Committee

HB 68

Opponent Testimony

Rev. Andrew Burns

June 12, 2023

My name is Rev. Andrew Burns, my pronouns are he/him. I am an Ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church, and I currently serve King Avenue United Methodist Church in Columbus as their Associate Pastor. I am strongly opposed to House Bill 68.

This bill would ban gender-affirming healthcare for minors and would harm the mental and physical well-being of LGBTQ+ youth across Ohio, especially transgender and non-binary youth.

As a pastor concerned about my local congregation, I ask you to oppose House Bill 68. Several members of my congregation are transgender; others have beloved family members and close friends who are transgender. Further, a large percentage of my congregation identifies as LGBTQ+. This bill communicates to so many people in my church that there is something inherently wrong with them. As their pastor, I can tell you that there is nothing wrong with them. My gender identity is no better or worse than that of the transgender members. They are simply trying to exist in their God-given identity, just as I am and just as we all are.

I come to this position through my faith, the Scriptures, and the theological values I try to live my life by. However, my opposition comes not only from the abstract values of my faith; it is rooted in my pastoral responsibility to care for the members of my church. One of the most important aspects of my job as King Avenue's Associate Pastor is to create a safe space and to be a safe person for members of my flock, especially those who are marginalized, such as transgender members of my church. This bill would take away other safe spaces that they do have. Trans people's risk of suicide is already higher than the general population; not because of any inherent mental or emotional deficiency on their part, but from the rejection and marginalization they experience in so many areas of their life. I fear it would put my transgender church members and their families and friends at a higher risk of suicide when one more piece of their society turns its back on them.

When that happens, our senior pastor or I would have to do those funerals. I cannot tell you how heartbreaking that would be, presiding over the funeral of a wonderful, beloved member of my congregation who took their own life because the law of the land tells them that there is something inherently wrong with them. I don't want to do that funeral. I would, because that's the job. But if this bill becomes law, I fear I would be one of the ones left cleaning up the mess of broken lives that this bill would leave behind.

Members of the committee, no one would be harmed if this bill dies in committee. Transgender Ohioans would keep on living their lives and you would keep on living your life. If this bill passes, I believe great harm would be caused. I ask you to consider my testimony and vote no on this harmful bill.