

Representative Lipps, Ranking Member Liston, my name is Annetra Bush, M. Div. candidate at Luther Seminary, here today as the senior leader of and standing for the faith based non-profit organization, Overflow International, located in Pataskala, Ohio. I am here today to offer testimony in opposition to HB 68.

As a Christian leader who is not only a parent to teens but also works with teens in the community each week, I have grave concerns regarding a bill which I believe will exacerbate the mental health crisis, lead to more suicide attempts, and impose unintended pain and suffering on one of the most vulnerable but least understood population groups in our state. I am a Bible believing Christian leader who embraces the ethic of being a “good Berean” when presented with theology which challenges my understanding. As a follower of Jesus, it is essential that I remain humble and teachable so that I may grow and mature in my understanding and practice of my faith. Jesus, His life, death, and resurrection is the center on which my faith rests. Following Jesus’ example of not only how to love God and our fellow man but also His demonstration of what constitutes justice prevents us from remaking God in our own image.

My faith shows me that Jesus was in the business of proving mercy whenever He had the chance, especially when it came to those outside of what was considered conventional. This bill tries to masquerade as being “safe” while it prevents justice and mercy from flowing to those most in need and threatens those who may be inclined to follow God’s law over the imagination of man. Using the tools of fear and intimidation, by extending the statute of limitations five times¹ what is normal for malpractice claims, SB 68 attempts to strong-arm physicians to comply with a law that prevents them from offering evidence-based best practices and instead choose self-protection. When the helpers are no longer able to help, we all lose, and an extremely dangerous precedent is established.

Someone close to me identifies as non-binary. When the individual initially tried to tell me of their feelings, I am ashamed that my initial response was not affirming or listening to understand but one of fear and dread. I was not afraid God would reject them; I was afraid of what Christians and people like those who have drafted this bill would do to them. I did not affirm the person and instead followed the conservative Christian path laid out by recommending prayer, repentance, inner healing, and therapy to fix what was believed broken, sinful, and evil. Years later, I learned that my response caused the person to deny who they were which resulted in years of suffering with shame, self-hatred, suicidal ideation, and depression. Thankfully, that person lived to embrace who God made them to be, is still a Christian, and has forgiven me for responding from fear and ignorance. The depression and suicide prevalent among trans youth is linked to non-affirming care from trusted helpers, parents, peers, and faith communities; the risk is not in the few who had gender reassignment surgery as this bill suggests. If this bill is passed, the likelihood is that those who sign it into law will be responsible for the increased suffering of youth, families, and communities across the state. As a faith leader, parent, and citizen of Ohio I stand in opposition to this bill and pray mercy and justice will prevail.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.

(¹) No action upon a medical, dental, optometric, or chiropractic claim shall be commenced more than four years after the occurrence of the act or omission constituting the alleged basis of the medical, dental, optometric, or chiropractic claim. (Ohio Revised Code. Section: 2305.113)