

I came out as transgender publically in June of 2018, at the age of 20 although I had been closeted for about a year before that. This month marks 5 years of me taking the brave step to live my life in all aspects as my authentic self. While I would like to say coming out was an easy decision, it wasn't and I often found myself wondering if coming out was worth it. My number one worry was about my safety. Former President Trump had been in office for a year and a half and the hatred in his followers towards people like me was on the rise. While I was safe away at college with a loving support system, would the "real" world show me the same acceptance? Ultimately, the pain of not being my authentic self outweighed my fear of hatred and discrimination. I hope for a brighter tomorrow for people like me.

Back then I assumed the future would hold progress towards equality for all, steps towards healing the hatred that plagued our fellow citizens, a path forged for acceptance and tolerance for those who are different from us. Not only have we not made any progress, we have regressed severely in this fight for equality. To say I am disappointed is an understatement. Everyday I worry about my safety as a transgender individual. I see the hatred blasted daily on news channels, on social media. I see the lies spread about people like me. It is exhausting. I often wonder why I continue this fight in Ohio, why I haven't moved to a safer, more accepting state. But then I remember our youth and how afraid they must be to be growing up in a world that is trying to erase their existence as LGBTQ+ individuals. I picture the fear I had at 20 and intensify it tenfold. That is why I continue to fight, why I write this testimony. LGBTQ+ youth need to see they are not alone in this fight. That there are adults who understand their struggles and want to make the world a better place for them.

House Bill 68 is a direct attack on the safety of LGBTQ+ minors in Ohio. As we all know it seeks to ban ALL gender affirming healthcare for transgender youth backed by this idea that it is to protect our children. This is a fallacy based on a mountain of lies, misinformation and religious propaganda. If this really is about protecting our children, those that proposed the bill would have done proper research, would see that LGBTQ+ youth are extremely vulnerable in today's society. They would know that these youth have the highest suicide attempt rates not because of who they are but because of the sheer amount of hate and discrimination they face both at school and at home. They would know that leading world health organizations support gender affirming healthcare and deem it as life saving. They'd know that the claim that children are having their genitals mutilated as part of this care is false and without any evidence.

This bill isn't about protecting our youth, it's about scaring those who are different from the norm into conformity. Why are we putting healthcare decisions in the hands of lawmakers? Why is this body attempting to make highly individualized medical decisions for youth they don't personally know? Shouldn't we trust the doctors and psychologists who have years of experience in this field? Shouldn't we be putting this decision in the hands of our youths' parents? This bill, if passed, would take away a parent's ability to choose what is best for their child.

While it is true, there are individuals who detransition or regret seeking medical care at a young age, this is a small percentage. Does this small percentage mean all access to gender affirming care should be taken away? Have we asked our transgender youth how this makes them feel?

This bill is supposedly to protect them. Have we asked their parents and medical providers the risks of banning any and all access to this care? I ask again, why are lawmakers making this decision when they are not the experts in this field?

House Bill 68 does not protect our youth; it puts our already at risk LGBTQ+ youth in further danger. It shows them that this Ohio does not support them, that they are not safe here. It shows them that the hate based on fallacies and propaganda has bled into our legislative system. Ultimately, it shows them that Ohio has failed at keeping them safe.

This bill isn't about saving our children in Ohio, it's about spreading an ideology of hate and misconception. Those who have studied history and are watching what is happening in other states fear that this is only the first step in a long line of discriminatory bills to be considered by this body. We see in Florida that not only have they passed a bill that bans gender affirming healthcare for minors, but now the same care is banned from adults. We know from history that one of the first groups the Nazi Regime attacked were LGBTQ+ individuals and the scientists and doctors who were researching and practicing gender affirming healthcare.

I beg this committee to not allow this bill to continue forward, to stop hate in its tracks, to not allow history to repeat itself, to think of ALL of our youth and their futures. History has its eyes on this committee today, I pray that you choose to be on the right side of it.