



# HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
N. KY • OH • WV

June 14, 2023

Representative Lipps and Ranking Member Liston,

My name is Reverend Doctor David Long-Higgins and I serve as the Conference Minister of the Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ. The Heartland Conference includes all of the 323 United Church of Christ congregations in the state of Ohio comprising nearly 80,000 members. I speak in opposition to proposed House Bill 68 and would like to share with you the reason for my opposition.

For over thirty years, the Heartland Conference has affirmed the beloved identity of all God's children whether they are gay or straight, male, female, trans or non-binary. Our national church and our Conference have long recognized that God has created a spectrum of human experience and that there are some for whom their inner identity does not match their outer body.

Such incongruence of experience has led many to consider and even complete suicide. In the past year alone 46% of transgender and non-binary youth considered suicide and 20% of transgender and nonbinary youth have attempted suicide in the state of Ohio. 85% of transgender youth in the state of Ohio report symptoms of anxiety and 71% report symptoms of depression.

But for me as a pastor and leader of congregations, this is about more than numbers. It is what the numbers represent that matters to me. They represent people's lives. I have personally pastored with youth and parents around the realities of needing gender-affirming care. I have seen the difference it has made in their lives as they have been able to finally feel the congruence of inner and outer self which is a God-given hope for every human being. Equally, I have had them share about others who did not receive such support and who tragically took their own lives.

Truly access to gender-affirming care is a mental health issue and a life and death issue. It is one that youth and parents should not be arbitrarily prevented from tending because of laws constructed by others for whom such care has no immediate impact except to exacerbate their pain.

It is for this reason that I oppose House Bill 68. First, it is unnecessary. Second, it is an overreach into the lives of Ohioans who are seeking to claim their best selves so that they may be more able to contribute to our shared life. Finally, it carries the potential of great harm and thus seeks to codify into law the very thing the law is intended to prevent.

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I urge that this House Bill 68 not move forward and that it be opposed by you at every turn.

The United Church of Christ, national, regional, and local, have sought to create safe spaces where the fullness of one's humanity, regardless of presentation or expression, can not only be welcomed, but affirmed. The State of Ohio for whom you serve as representatives should be committed to nothing less.

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

Rev. Dr. David Long-Higgins

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