

Ohio House State and Local Government Committee
House Bill 68
Opponent Testimony
Elizabeth Montenegro, BA, CT
June 13th, 2023
Written-Only Testimony

Chair Lipps, Vice-Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston & members of the Public Health Policy Committee, my name is Elizabeth Montenegro. I am a counselor trainee and current mental health counseling master's student at the University of Cincinnati. As a mental health professional who works specifically with queer and transitional-age clients, I ask you to oppose House Bill 68.

HB 68 aims to ban critical, gender-affirming healthcare for at-risk youth in Ohio. This bill would target an already-marginalized population and prevent them from receiving life-saving medical care. Not only does this bill deny healthcare to young people, but it also blocks their access to important mental health care. This bill targets trans and non-binary Ohio youth and only serves to intensify their suffering.

As a mental health counselor, I ask you to oppose HB 68. Gender-affirming healthcare is evidence-based and endorsed by physicians, mental health professionals, and other licensed providers. Denying trans and non-binary youth access to this affirming healthcare will have detrimental effects on their mental and physical well-being. We will see increases in the rates of attempted and completed suicide, self-harm behavior (such as cutting and burning), and mental distress and disorders (including major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder). Young lives will suffer, but so will the parents, families, and communities of the children who take their own lives. As a counselor, I experience this pain first-hand and I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy.

Not only does HB 68 ban affirming healthcare, but it also limits my scope of practice as a mental health counselor and creates invasive practices. Requiring additional mental health disorder and trauma screenings prior to assigning a gender dysphoria diagnosis is acceptable: this is standard practice for counselors, and I support this legislation. But requiring mental health professionals to report their client data to the department of health for monitoring is a dangerous

precedent for a surveillance state in healthcare. Furthermore, I struggle to comprehend how this practice will create a safer, more supportive environment for an already-marginalized population. Manipulating mental health professionals' practice in this way will only intensify trans and non-binary youth pain.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on HB 68. I appreciate your consideration of my perspective as a mental health professional. I hope you choose to support the health of trans and non-binary youth and oppose this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Montenegro", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Elizabeth Montenegro, BA, CT