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Members of Public Health Policy Committee, thank you for hearing our testimony today. My name is Lalitha Pamidigantam, and I represent YWCA Columbus as Advocacy Manager. YWCA Columbus is on a mission to eliminate racism, empower women, and promote peace, justice, freedom, and dignity, for all. Our mission is why we are here today in strong opposition to House Bill 68.

We write to you on this issue from the perspective of an organization whose mission includes promoting dignity for all. The issue of transgender healthcare is one of dignity. Transgender people being debated on a statewide and national scale is undignified. Having transgender youth, parents of transgender youth, and organizations who protect transgender youth constantly fighting with our governing bodies sworn to serve *us* is not dignified. Transgender medical patients having to flee the state to find the care they deserve is not dignified. A dignified approach to healthcare is when the medical decisions of a person is kept among themselves, their caretaker or guardian, and their medical professional. House Bill 68 is a government overreach into the lives of your constituents, and it is an undignified approach to lawmaking and serving your constituents. We are here to defend the dignity of transgender youth today.

We speak in front of you as experts on the issues of womanhood. So often, proponents of this bill and others like it purport that by denying medical freedom to transgender youth, it is somehow saving young girls and women. We thought it would be prudent to speak as a historically women's agency to put a swift end to that narrative. For our credentials, Committee should know that we serve women and girls as a historically women's agency that has served the Central Ohio region for over one hundred years. We are inclusive of transgender women and girls. We heartily recognize in fact, that transgender women and girls lead women's movements, especially Black transgender women and girls, and we honor their place in the movement for women's rights and safety. We stand before you today to disrupt the narrative that any of this legislation being produced protects women, because in fact, it harms women and girls.

We'd like to make it clear that young girls are experiencing a mental health crisis right now – including transgender girls. Solving this mental health crisis for transgender youth means expanding access to gender affirming care. Instead of legislating away access to mental healthcare, we would ask the sponsors and cosponsors of this bill to produce legislation that actually supports mental health issues such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression by investigating the real causes – the diminishing self-esteem that young girls face, the lack of rape and sexual assault prevention education, and the structural lack of access to medical and mental health supports. We'd also like to point out that the mental health crisis that our young girls face that are rooted in gender-based violence and discriminatory experiences not only include trans girls and trans women, but trans girls and trans women are actually more likely to experience these issues and at higher rates than cisgender girls. Transgender people are four times more likely to experience violent victimization than cisgender people.¹ Nearly *half* of transgender people are sexually assaulted at some point in their lives.² Furthermore, Black transgender and non-binary young people experience higher rates of violent victimization, and high rates of suicidality.³ We agree with the proponents that there is a crisis of mental health.

¹ <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/ncvs-trans-press-release/>

² <https://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-assault-and-the-lgbt-community>

³ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/mental-health-of-black-transgender-and-nonbinary-young-people-feb-2023/>

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Discrimination and lack of structural medical support are at the root of this mental health crisis. If this committee is interested in preventing poor mental health outcomes for girls, we'd love to work with you on how to properly address and fix it for *all* girls. One way to start is by giving your strong "no" vote on this bill, and instead urgently moving to work on increasing access to medical care for all people.

Lastly, we believe in the ability of these families to make decisions for themselves. We strongly recommend another segment of our mission be honored: freedom. We promote freedom for all. There is freedom in choosing your medical care, and preventing big government overreach from deciding what to do with one's own body. This freedom ought to be respected and left in the privacy of the hands of transgender youth, parents, and their medical teams.

At a time when prospective medical students are turning education opportunities at Ohio universities down, when people are refusing to work in medical institutions in Ohio, and transgender families are weighing their options on leaving the state – taking their economic contributions and lovely, bright children with them – this bill is a death sentence for Ohio in many ways. We strongly urge a "no" vote on this bill.

Thank you,
Lalitha Pamidigantam
Advocacy Manager, YWCA Columbus

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