

June 9, 2023

Jeff Phair
4843 Long Dr.
Liberty Township, OH 45011
RE: Opposition Testimony for HB68

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston and Members of the Public Health Policy Committee,

My name is Jeff Phair. I am a lifelong Ohioan, a business owner, an athlete, and a father to 3 amazing kids. And I am here today to urge you to reject HB 68 and to leave all decisions related to medical care for transgender minors, in the hands of parents or legal guardians and medical professionals.

As the father of three kids, I understand firsthand the tremendous responsibility that comes with parenthood and the burden associated with making responsible medical decisions in complex care situations. This is not a responsibility that I take lightly. My children are ages 13, 14 & 22 now but from the time they were babies, my wife and I carefully conducted our own research and consulted with trained medical professionals before making any medical-related decision for our kids.

From vaccinations to ear infections, ADHD & something more complex, like Gender Dysphoria, we have always taken a thoughtful approach which includes carefully studying all options, weighing pros and cons and talking in depth with leading pediatricians, expert mental health professionals and other parents with children who have a similar diagnosis.

Of course, some decisions have been easier to make than others. For example, when I was first told that one of my children may be transgender, I'll admit it was very hard for me to accept. Part of this was due to how I was raised and the fact that I had no experience with LGBTQ people and I did not understand how gender identity works. Regretfully, I can admit that I didn't think any of it was real for quite some time. After all, I was nearly 40 years old at that time, and I didn't know anyone who was transgender. It was not something you heard about on the news or read about on social media. And, it certainly wasn't a commonly discussed religious issue or a hot button political issue, like it is today.

Like many others, and perhaps some of you, I had the mindset that my child was too young to know who they were. I told myself that they were confused, and it was just a phase they would grow out of. It took me quite a bit of time to wrap my head around all of it. For nearly a year I tried to convince myself, my wife and close relatives, that all of it would pass and that this was just a phase. Soon, I experienced a strained relationship with my child, and I watched their condition deteriorate, because of this approach.

In time I began to see that things were not changing, so I began to educate myself and tried to truly get to know who my child was on the inside. Quickly, I realized that my position was not only wrong & detrimental to my child's health, but I also began to recognize that I was my child's first bully.

So, when I learned there was a clinic at our local children's hospital, my wife and I decided to set up an appointment. I was quite nervous, but also grateful to be able to consult with a team of medical professionals, and to my surprise, when I walked out of the appointment, I left feeling empowered and hopeful.

The appointment itself was nearly two hours long and we saw several health care providers, all of whom were very professional and asked a lot of questions. Looking for a concrete answer (as to whether or not my child was or wasn't transgender), I recall being told that only time would tell. The medical team explained, there is no bloodwork, testing or brain imaging to confirm if someone is transgender, so the best thing we could do is just watch and love.

That's right, watch and love. The answer was very simple, and that was perfect because I am a simple guy. My wife and I were encouraged to stay connected to our child and to try to do more listening than talking and to show our support by simply following our child's lead.

For us, this meant walking a step behind, not encouraging anything one way or another but simply giving our child the space to figure out who they are and allowing them to express themselves through things like hairstyle or clothing that more closely aligned with how they saw themselves.

All of this made sense to my wife and I, who have always been careful when it comes to making medical decisions for our children. We found this approach to be thoughtful, compassionate and above all, responsible. We went home and followed the advice we had been given in the months and years to follow and we also began meeting families with kids like ours.

When we got together with those other families (once a week for several years) we all shared stories about our kids and what medical advice and care they had received from our doctors & mental health providers and we quickly realized there were dozens of kids just like ours, who live near us and all of them had similar experiences with the team of physicians at our local pediatric hospital.

I think this is very important for the members of this committee to hear because I've listened to prior testimony and accusations made from legislators indicating that these highly educated and trained TEAMS of medical professionals in Ohio Children's Hospitals are reckless, negligent and perhaps even scaring parents and patients into irreversible medical treatments.

I'm here today to make it very clear that at NO point in time did my family experience that, nor do we know of any family who has had such an experience. We know many families with trans kids and we've never heard of any high pressure situation where a physician scared a parent into treatment or prescribed medication after seeing a patient for a few minutes or minors being subjected to surgeries to remove body parts, or any minor patient who was treated by physicians without the consent from their parent or guardian.

We've also never heard of anyone who had a minor child who thought they were transgender but changed their mind as an adult and de-transitioned, until these hearings. We do, however, know plenty of trans young adults that are thriving in school, have graduated from college, own their own business, have become parents themselves and are highly productive members of our community.

I am confident that you would hear dozens more success stories like ours, if more time was devoted to hearing from transgender Ohioans & their families. You'd hear plenty of stories of families who participated in watchful waiting, stories of children and young adults who have grown up trans and have NEVER wavered in their sense of who they are. You'd hear from countless parents (like me) who have NO agenda except to help their children grow up to be healthy and happy, just like each of you want for

your own children and grandchildren. And you'd hear stories from moms and dads who are certain their child is alive today because of the skilled care being provided by Ohio Children's Hospitals.

I've been on this journey for the past 8 years and I've watched my child blossom and witnessed great things. All of which would not be possible if we did not have access to the resources and life-saving medical care from our local children's hospital. Please take a moment to CONSIDER where you'd take your child or grandchild for a broken bone, a concussion or any serious illness. If the answer is a local children's hospital, then you might consider that these are the same medical professionals that I trust for my child's care.

In closing I want to be very clear: hospitals and doctors are NOT acting irresponsibly. What is irresponsible is politicizing a deeply personal, complex MEDICAL ISSUE and limiting parental rights and medical freedoms. **I urge you to say NO to HB 68** and keep ALL decisions related to the medical treatment of minors in Ohio in the hands of their parents or guardians and their pediatrician.

Politics has NO place in this matter.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jeff Phair

