

Please Reject HB68

To: Chair Lipps, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Public Health Policy Committee

I. BACKGROUND:

Hello, my name is Danielle Schultz, and I am from Akron, Ohio. **I am here to respectfully request that you reject HB68.** My husband and I are proud parents to two college age daughters and a teenage son. I am a stay-at-home mom with a master's in education, and my husband is a law professor at University of Akron Law School.

Before I continue, I want to make it clear that my son has approved of my testifying publicly -- and is mature enough to make that decision.

Our son came out as transgender 5 years ago, in 2018, when he was 12. He had every reason to believe I'd be a supportive parent. I was vocal about equality and leading an LGBTQ-celebrating Christian group. But I was shocked when he came out -- and I regret how I handled it. I couldn't UNDERSTAND, so I focused on trying to *understand why my son was trans*. This was a mistake.

My son was withdrawing, and I could see his jaw tighten and pain in his eyes **every time** I used his birth name. Being a parent is humbling, and I finally asked myself, "what if I'm wrong?" That helped me focus on **what my son needed**: for me to believe him and accept that people are who they say they are. It was time to get some masculine clothes, take him out of his conservative religious school, and find experts to help us. That's how I learned about gender affirming care.

Now my husband and I make decisions about our son's medical care in consultation with expert doctors and therapists. **HB68 would deny parents' ability to make medical decisions for their own children and replace expert doctors with state control.**

As to "**why**," my son is trans: I can tell you with certainty that it was not "social contagion." My strict "one hour of screen time per day," which included only parent-approved shows and games, did not cause our son to be transgender. Nor

did friends or societal trends. NO outside force causes a person to be transgender. Gender identity is personal and *needs no justification*. Our son just is who he is-- a caring, funny, wise-beyond-his years boy. We are so proud of him.

And he's doing great! Our son is active in community service and has nice friends. He graduated a year early from high school and is attending college in the fall.

II. DEFINING GENDER AFFIRMING CARE

The Department of Health and Human Services defines gender affirming care as non-medical and medical services that allow a person to live as their true gender. (<https://opa.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2022-03/gender-affirming-care-young-people-march-2022.pdf>)

This includes social affirmation, mental health care, and medical care.

1. Social Affirmation - My son *transitioned socially* in middle school, expressing his gender identity through appearance, name, and some activities.

2. Mental Health Care - I learned that a gender affirming therapist supports a child's *exploration* of gender identity. They don't push a specific gender identity on children. Counselors also help trans children process the fact that so many adults are working to erase their existence. We try to protect our kids, but that toxicity makes it through. Thank goodness for good therapists.

3. Medical Health Care - *Children and adolescents cannot receive gender affirming medical care without the consent and cooperation of their parents*. Even *with* parental consent, there is a long process with medical tests and doctors and therapists before a teenager can begin taking *any* gender affirming medicine. Our children's doctors follow guidelines provided by the most reputable American and international medical groups. How can the Ohio legislature be more qualified than these groups that *all agree* what is best practice?

Regarding Gender-Affirming Surgeries: Trans children don't have surgery. It takes years of therapy and doctor appointments before trans *adults* can have surgery. Few doctors would perform surgery on a minor.

III. GENDER AFFIRMING MEDICAL CARE IS A FORM OF WELLNESS CARE.

I consider adolescent gender affirming medical care to be part of basic wellness care. Wellness care saves lives. For example, a person with asthma or gender dysphoria isn't ill, but they might need medicine for their body to function properly. And in both cases, **denying medical care is life threatening.**

In conclusion, those who support HB68, please ask yourself, "What if I am wrong? What if HB68 passes out of this Committee, eventually becomes law, and I am **wrong** about its effect?"

Because you are denying life affirming and life-saving medical care *to children*. And you will be responsible for their harm.

Please reject HB68.