

Senate Education Committee Members, I am submitting this testimony in opposition to HB8 which will cause significant harm to children and educators in Ohio. I live in a rural county in Northeast Ohio and am on the board of a small nonprofit organization that serves the LGBTQ+ community and their families. Our organization has worked with multiple children who have been thrown out of their homes or abused because a parent found out they were LGBTQ. Two years ago we had a high school senior who, along with his boyfriend, was severely beaten when his father learned he was gay. We were asked to help find emergency housing once the boys were released from the hospital. We've had multiple children who attend our support groups who live in group homes and foster homes because their parents rejected them for being LGBTQ. We've also had multiple suicides in our county the past several years because children couldn't tell their parents they thought they might be gay. The most egregious aspect of this bill is that it requires teachers and counselors to out students EVEN when they know a child is at risk of abuse. We already have a serious problem with LGBTQ+ youth being homeless in this country. Nationally, 40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ+, many are in foster care because they are LGBTQ+, and LGBTQ+ youth have a 120% higher risk of being homeless than their peers ([National Network for Youth](#)). And the problem is not relegated only to large coastal cities. A recent study showed that 32% of foster care youth in Cuyahoga County were LGBT ([Cuyahoga Youth Count](#)).

I'm a parent of two teens myself so I understand the desire of a parent to know everything going on in their child's life. Both of my children see therapists and have for some time. And yes, there are many times when I would really like to know what they are talking about. But this is about them, not me, and they have the right to say things to a trusted adult without that adult "tattling" to me or my husband. All mental health professionals and school personnel are already mandatory reporters. Children will never open up to a counselor if they think everything they say will be repeated to their parents, thus defeating the entire purpose of counseling and preventing children from seeking desperately needed help. Would you tell your counselor about an issue you were having with your spouse if you knew they would turn around and divulge to your spouse what you said? Probably not. And yet, if you don't disclose something to your counselor they can't adequately treat you.

I know how hard it is to not know everything about your child. However, part of being a parent includes knowing when your child needs to talk to someone who is not you. Without the ability to do that, the lives of Ohio's children will become exceedingly more difficult.