

Opponent Testimony, HB 8
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee

Chair Bird, Vice-Chair Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Public Health Policy Committee, thank you for your time and for providing the opportunity to hear our testimony.

My name is Ashley Dudinsky (she/her). I am a social work instructor in Ohio and as such provide education and support for the students that I get the honor of working with. I am testifying today to express my opposition to HB 8 which would have a serious and critical impact on Ohio's students.

As a country, we have done extensive work to focus on the autonomy of individuals and now HB 8 is impacting youth to have the ability to grow in their autonomy and to represent themselves as they truly are. The student's safety should be of top priority; however, having this bill in place could create and endanger the student by through the impact and lack of control leading to unsafe learning and living environments. HB 8 would intentionally put the student at possible risk by outing the student to their families without knowing what the home environment consists of, including the possibility for abuse or violence. HB 8 would also negatively impact the mental health profession and the long-standing safety and ethical care that we provide.

The Social Work Code of Ethics emphasizes client confidentiality and autonomy among other important factors to ensure the safety, respect, and well-being of the individuals that we work with. Mental health professionals, including social workers, are expected to uphold these high ethical standards which already includes a mandate to report if a client is a serious risk to themselves or others. HB 8 would mandate the parents of the youth to be notified of any change to mental, emotional, or physical health services or if a student identifies as a gender that does not align with their sex at birth. No matter how an individual identifies, they are still a human-being that is not experiencing a mental health change, it is the person coming forth as they authentically are. The therapeutic relationship would also be compromised, and the safety of confidentiality diminished. The new regulations would require that the individual be denied the ability to share their authentic self in the way they choose.

As mental health providers, our role is to ensure the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual safety of individuals, to ensure social justice for all humans, and to assure that all individuals have their dignity and worth protected which is the reason I am opposed to HB 8.

I urge you to vote no on HB 8 to help protect our youth and the role of mental health professionals whose primary focus is to help all individuals, specifically our youth.

Thank you.