

Statement of Theresa Jeanne Ankenman RN, BSN, JD

Supporting a law to prohibit gender change chemicals and surgery before the age of 18 in the State of Ohio.

In 1993 I went to work for the Ohio Department of Mental Health at Millcreek Psychiatric Center for Children because I did not have children and I wanted to use my skills as a psychiatric nurse for children. I learned during that job that the State is inadequate as a parental guide. The State also came to this conclusion and closed the facility. The primary reason the State was inadequate is that it could not be directive. The State was honor bound to protect but also honor bound not to direct, but to let the citizen, no matter who they were, make choices within their rights. While staff were directive in the residential center for the sake of safety, health and peace; treatment team goals were thwarted because of the vague array of people who were "in charge" of the child's future.

Jump forward to fall of 2022 and I took a travel nurse assignment at a Private Children's Hospital in Ohio with an amazing reputation. I was placed on an adolescent unit that was employing a new philosophy of intense programming with disciplinary protocols worked out by the child and a therapist. The theory was that the energy of violence could be thwarted by constant occupation in tasks. Goals for achievement were designed with rewards tailored to the personal motivation of each child. The inexplicable part of the program was that the children, instead of an authority, set the achievement goals. Instead of an expectation to fit a socially appropriate norm, the children had a variety of approved deviations from "fair and normal" expectations that created havoc both in execution of programs and in the social circle of children due to the variations of expectation for behavior. In short, while I admit that I have not completely read *Lord of the Flies*, I certainly lived the reports about the book on that unit. The 300 plus pound pre-teen with the sharpest tongue ruled the program. It was a disappointing turn of milieu for a hospital that was known as a great care taker and a great employer. The results of that chaos were constant holes in the walls, injuries to staff, and fear that fueled continued disruptions of the therapeutic programming.

Children's mental health is a big part of existential gender fluidity. At every point in normal development children are exposed to new and different emotional challenges because of change. Gender questions contain these same emotional burdens. As a mental health nurse of over forty years I have seen that the choices children make are constantly changing as they learn, feel and discover who they are over their dependent years.

The role of the State is to neither decide nor prohibit the life styles of its citizens. However, protective boundaries are the role of law. The law protects minors from permanent change of their growing self from cigarettes and alcohol. Minors should also be protected from the chemicals and surgeries used for gender change. It is not a judgment on a citizen's life style to give them the permission to make their own life style choices by limiting that choice to when they meet their responsible majority. A law limiting body altering gender change until age 18 protects the undeveloped child who is negotiating change and also protects the life style of those who change gender because they independently make that decision after they obtain the right of independence.