

December 5, 2023 | Testimony in Opposition to Ohio HB 63

Dear Committee Chair Roegner, Vice-Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Government Oversight Committee:

My name is Hank Osmundson and I serve as Associate Pastor of Community Engagement at St. John's United Church of Christ in Columbus. I am grateful for the opportunity to add my voice to the throng of voices of Ohioans in opposition of the needless and callous attack on parental rights, medical and mental health professionals, and trans people.

The restrictions proposed in this bill seek to curtail the freedom of Ohio parents to raise their children as they see fit. In fact, with so much rhetoric calling for the preservation of parental rights, I find it alarming that some of the most vocal proponents of parental rights are also vocal supporters of this bill which quite plainly strips parents of their rights. It makes me wonder if it is about parental rights at all and not just an avenue to frame the erosion of rights of some parents and their children in service to political, religious, and moral grandstanding. Or, if it really is about parental rights, then why is there such fervor to remove the rights of Ohio parents to determine what health care their children receive?

The very presence of more health care professionals opposing this bill compared to the number providing support should be reason enough for the members of the committee to not send it to the full legislature. Both my faith and my personal experiences lead me to listen to people who have been trained to do things I cannot do. I believe that God created human beings with an astounding capacity for compassion, love, empathy, knowledge, and more. I believe that medical science is one of the direct indicators of the generosity of God. People who have dedicated their lives to learning how bodies and brains work are telling us that they do not approach gender-affirming care to anyone, let alone minors, as trivial. My 15-year-old nephew is receiving compassionate, thoughtful, measured, transparent and evidence-based care from the staff at Nationwide Children's Hospital. His parents are involved in every step of the process and nothing is done without their consent. My nephew moved from self-harming despair to delight at what his future holds as he continues to grow into the man God created him to be. Much of that is because of the care at Nationwide, the care shown by his therapist, the unwavering support of his parents, friends, teachers, and attendees of his church. My nephew, and many children like him, deserve to

flourish; it is what God wants for humankind. Lawmakers telling medical professionals that they know better is unnecessary at best and insulting at worst. I trust doctors. I trust therapists. I have personally benefited from the science of medicine. I implore you to listen to the professionals who have told you that this bill will do more harm than good for many, many people. One of whom is my nephew.

Finally, although religious beliefs should not have an impact on legislation that affects all citizens of a myriad of faiths, many of the supporters of this bill, and indeed its sponsor, invoke their faith as the foundation for this support. Therefore, I am invoking my Christian faith as a follower of Jesus Christ for my opposition to this bill and my request that you vote no.

In the three synoptic Gospels of the New Testament, it is told that a man who was a lawyer and religious scholar, approached Jesus and asked Him what the greatest of all commandments was. Jesus replied: To love God with your entire being - heart, soul, and mind - and to love your neighbor as you love yourself. The centrality of Love, Hope, and radical inclusion to the ministry of Jesus Christ cannot be disputed, though sometimes it seems the most vociferous complaints about radical inclusion and even Love often come from those who claim to follow Jesus' teachings. I try to view all of my interactions with others through the lens of Love. This includes when I exercise my right to vote. Many times there are issues on the ballot that whether passed or rejected would literally have zero impact on my day-to-day life and existence. Yet, I am asked to make a decision that almost certainly would profoundly affect the lives and wellbeing of others. It is at that time that I think about this Great Commandment and I also think about the Beatitudes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. How will my choice on this particular matter impact the people around me, including those I don't know or with whom I disagree? I truly believe that if more of us - citizens and elected representatives - who claim to follow Jesus would keep this in mind when we vote, we would come just a bit closer to a world where everyone has the opportunity to flourish.

Please do not send this bill out of your committee. It is not compassionate, it is not neighborly, it is not safe.

Blessings and Hope,  
*Hank Osmundson*, M.Div.  
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