

Opponent Testimony for HB68
Government Oversight Committee
December 5, 2023
Aaron Burkle

Chairperson Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Government Oversight Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Aaron and my pronouns are he and him. I live in northeast Ohio where I have been an adjunct professor at three institutions of higher learning for nearly 15 years. I am also an officer in the Army National Guard. I live with my wife and two daughters, Astrid, aged 10 years and Abs, aged 15 years. They are all in support of this testimony today and we are all opposed to House Bill 68.

I wanted to write an angry letter to you because this legislation under consideration makes me sick to my stomach and angry but instead I find myself doing something I'm unaccustomed to - begging. I beg you to listen to the many voices speaking up against this legislation. I beg you to listen to the medical experts who know how gender affirming care works and helps young transgender humans. I beg you to reconsider this dangerous and hurtful and misinformed legislation. I beg you on behalf of my own family and our ten-year-old transgender daughter as well as the thousands of other families with transgender youth in the state of Ohio. What can we say to convince you that this is not a "choice" our children make? What must I do to prove to you that we have done all the research and have worked closely with Astrid's pediatrician and psychologist to ensure she is getting the best care possible? We did not rush into this, on the contrary we initially denied and dismissed the idea that our sweet youngest child was anything other than what she was assigned at birth..

Since Astrid was very young, she was always more interested in unicorns and mermaids instead of trucks and sports. She liked dressing-up as princesses and wearing all things pink, purple, and glittery. As Astrid grew older, she started to tell us that she felt like a girl and we naively dismissed her as too young and "just not into the typical boy things." That was fine, because my wife and I felt that children shouldn't be limited in their imagination by some imagined gender norms. Only after several years of increasing anxiety and appointments with her pediatrician and a child psychologist did we finally realize Astrid was truly, deeply uncomfortable with who the world was trying to force her to be. It became clear to us that she was not a boy. We never saw Astrid happier or more confident than when she started truly and fully living as her authentic self, two and a half years ago. Many of her anxiety symptoms disappeared almost immediately and we saw a light in her that we had not seen in a few years!

All you need to do is meet a transgender child and listen – truly listen – to their story. Transgender humans; children and adults alike, are no threat to you. They are just ordinary humans like the rest of us who want the same rights and freedoms as everyone else. Bills like this have stirred up so much controversy in the community and the country that transgender humans and their families have safety plans in place everywhere they go, in case there are people who are not supportive or willing to listen and who could potentially pose a threat. Is that any way for a 10 year old girl to have to live, constantly worried that someone might be a threat to her because they can't just mind their own business and let Astrid live her life?

The idea of being forced to go through male puberty in the next few years is terrifying to my daughter. Visits to the doctor in which someone might have to look at her body cause so much stress. Our care providers have shared the plan of care with us for when Astrid reaches the stage of puberty in which we would consider blockers. We will receive care from a pediatric endocrinologist who will monitor for any "risk factors" that have been shared with you as the "dangers" and we will work together to ensure Astrid is receiving safe care. That's how informed consent is supposed to work in healthcare, and when done properly, that's how it does work.

This isn't just our story. This is the story of so many families here in Ohio and across the country who are fighting for the rights of their transgender and gender nonconforming children. We just want our kids to have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. We just want our kids to have the chance to live healthy, happy, and fulfilling lives as their true and authentic selves. Isn't that what every parent wants for their child? Why suddenly is that too much to ask? On behalf of my family and so many others, I urge you to vote NO on House Bill 68. Thank you.