

Opponent Testimony for HB68  
Government Oversight Committee  
December 5, 2023  
Alicia 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 Alicia and my pronouns are she and her. I live in northeast Ohio. Professionally, I am a Program Manager in healthcare and I am also a veteran. Personally, I am the dedicated and incredibly proud mom of two amazing children, one who is 15 years old and identifies as gender queer, and the other Astrid, who is 10 years old and is transgender. I am also the wife of an adjunct college professor and National Guard soldier who just recently returned from a deployment in Southwest Asia. They are all in support of this testimony today and we are all opposed to House Bill 68.

After what seemed like such a short summer recess, we find ourselves back here fighting the same battles again. I have revised this testimony so many times, I have lost count. As a mom, how do I find the right words to convince all of you, a committee of strangers, that my child's existence is valid? What can I say to convince you that this was in no way a "choice" my child or my family made? What must I do to prove to you that my husband and I have done all of the research and have worked closely with Astrid's pediatrician and psychologist to ensure she is getting the best care possible?

Since Astrid was very young, she always more interested in unicorns and mermaids instead of trucks and "army guys", dressing-up like a princess instead of sports, and all things pink, purple, and glittery. As Astrid grew older, she started verbalizing that she felt like a girl, and we naively dismissed her and continued to allow her to express herself as she saw fit, which was often painted nails, sparkly shoes, and pink and purple clothing. Playdates often resulted in Astrid dressed in a Princess costume or tutu, make-up, and high heels. Daycare became preschool, and before we knew it Astrid was in second grade. With each passing year, Astrid became more anxious and more and more adamant 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!

Today, we have a vibrant, social, friendly, musical, gifted, active, 5th grade daughter who is absolutely thriving! Last spring, she performed in her first elementary school band concert, sang a solo in her school chorus concert, wrapped up her first musical theater performance, and received confirmation of a successful audition and acceptance into the Cleveland Orchestra Children's Preparatory Chorus (COCPC). She had her first slumber party for her 10th birthday, and if any of you have daughters, you know it was an exhausting night filled with so many giggles! This fall and winter, she has been managing a full rehearsal schedule with COCPC, auditioned for another youth theater program and was cast as the Lion in their upcoming production of The Wizard of Oz, and has been on the honor roll in her self-contained gifted program in the public school district she attends. She is truly living her very best life in so many ways!

The only thing causing her any anxiety these days, honestly, is this right here. Having to constantly justify her existence. We have lost family and friends who do not support Astrid. She gets curious questions from kids at school and Astrid is always willing to share her story and her journey with anyone who is willing to listen. Bills like this have stirred up so much controversy in the community and the country that we have safety plans in place everywhere we go, in case there are people who are not supportive or willing to listen and who could potentially pose a threat to Astrid or our family. 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.