

Chairwoman Roegner and ranking member Hicks-Hudson,

I am Deacon Nick Bates, I use he/him pronouns, and I am ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) called by the Southern Ohio Synod to ministries of justice and mercy. As we celebrate the Advent season, that four-week season BEFORE the 12 days of Christmas, I am saddened to see HB 68 coming before this committee. Advent is a season that calls us to focus on the possibility of what could be – that eternal hope - despite the brokenness of our world today. Children during Advent dream of the presents under the tree, a never-ending supply of cookies, and late-night movies with friends and cousins in pajamas.

As adults, we should use this season to imagine a world where all of God's children have the opportunity to thrive and live into their God-given humanity. We can imagine a world where all of God's children - regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation - can be their authentic and true selves. We can imagine a world where discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ community in housing and employment are things of the past. This Advent season, I invite you all to embrace the possibility of what could be – a better world for all of God's children.

I am a father of two children – both are beautiful baptized children of God. My oldest is 13, in the 8th grade and uses they/them pronouns. My youngest is 8, in the 3rd grade and uses she/her pronouns.

HB 68 puts both of my children in line for harassment. My 13 year old, who swims for enjoyment with their teammates through the YMCA may be denied access to the sport they have done for years because their gender neutral swimsuit won't be allowed. Transgendered and nonbinary kids will be barred from sports that help them to learn the value of teamwork, team spirit, and the importance of physical activity. HB 68 also puts my 8 year old daughter at risk. She is pretty rough in her athletic play and competitive. She might be accused of being trans by other teams to gain a competitive edge. The might judge her if she grows any facial hair - which many cisgendered women do – or if her shoulders are a bit too broad or a whole host of other stereotypes about body types. In an effort to protect women's sports, you have added a ton of body image issues to both cis and trans girls and young women that aren't needed.

From a theological perspective, Matthew 25:31-46 has a story called the judgement of nations. This is Jesus condemning political and religious leaders for refusing to prioritize those who are marginalized and outcasts in society. These are the verses where Jesus says, for when I was hungry you fed me, when I was in need of care you provided, when I was a stranger, you welcomed me. The nations assembled ask, but Lord when did we do these things – surely I tell you when you did them for those you call the least of these, you did them for me.

In the United States, [according to the Trevor Project](#)

- Nearly 1 in 5 transgender and nonbinary youth considered suicide last year
- 60% of LGBTQIA+ youth who sought mental healthcare were unable to get it.

- 37% of trans and nonbinary youth report being physically threatened or harmed due to their gender identity.

As a father, these statistics scare the hell out of me. As a faith leader, they highlight some of those who are considered *'the least of these'* in our world today. I hear Jesus' words calling us to care for those who are marginalized and struggling each day. We know that a loving and supportive home and community dramatically reduces the likelihood of harm. Supportive teams will literally save trans kids' lives. Shocker, research proves that Jesus' call to love our neighbor, our children, and the outcast is a good thing.

I hear people talk about genetics, quoting what we learned in 8th grade. I don't know my genetic markers; I am not a geneticist. I don't know the best counseling and medical plans for trans youth; I am not a doctor. I am a simple Deacon ordained like all clergy to ministries grounded in our call to love one another – to recognize the divine image that each person reflects.

As a parent, HB 68 will deny my child and other children the care they need. After Nationwide Children's hospital saved our daughter's life after she was born, I trust them. Pastors and Deacons should not be providing medical care. I trust the people at Children's Hospital, literally with my child's life. As they have testified and spoken many times, this is not a good bill for the health of children and youth. *And Jesus said to them, for when I was in need of care, you cared for me.* People and families are trying to care and support and most importantly love these kids. HB 68 prevents parents like me from providing the care my child needs.

This Advent season, I invite you all to embrace the hope of a world that God calls us into. Imagine our families, gathered around the tree, singing together. Imagine a world with no hunger, no fear of violence or war, everyone treated with dignity and respect in their lives. Picture the world we hope for this Advent Season - And take one moment.

Is my 13 year old in your image able to be who God made them to be? Are their trans and gender queer friends there too? The beautiful tapestry of humanity – knitted together with Divine love - needs their presence to be complete. Don't leave gaps in God's community.

Please vote NO on HB 68. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.