



Belonging Begins Here.

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Savannah Carlstrom Page, MSW, LSW, and I use she/they pronouns. I am a Licensed Social Worker in the state of Ohio, currently serving as the Director of Behavioral Health & Clinical Services at Kaleidoscope Youth Center. I am writing today in strong opposition to House Bill 68, which not only bans youth access to vital and life-saving gender affirming interventions, but also poses a serious threat to the profession of Social Work in Ohio.

In Ohio and across the nation, the behavioral health field is already struggling to maintain an adequate workforce. According to [The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers](#), Ohio saw a 353% increase in demand for behavioral health treatment between 2013 and 2019; this demand has continued to rise and that increase in demand is expected to continue. With increased demand comes longer waitlists, and an increase in time from presenting to concern to receipt of vital treatment. At the same time, agencies who provide behavioral health services are reporting significant obstacles to staff recruitment and retention, with contributing factors including attrition, stress, insurance issues, and credentialing. House Bill 68 proposes to create a separate, more restrictive set of rules that mental health providers must follow when working with youth who may receive a diagnosis of gender dysphoria than the rules that exist for working with all other youth in Ohio; this would make it more difficult for providers to accept minors in their practice, and create fear among providers of being targeted for providing evidence-based, ethical care.

It is important to also note that much of this additional regulation is completely unnecessary. The bill would require explicit consent from two parents/guardians to diagnose or treat a “gender-related condition,” when regulations are already in place requiring parental consent for minors receiving behavioral healthcare. The Ohio Revised Code currently states that youth 14 and older cannot receive services past 30 days or 6 sessions without parental consent, and for youth under 14, services cannot be provided at all without parental consent; HB 68 would override this law, but only for minors seeking diagnosis or treatment of a “gender-related condition.” Parents and guardians also already have the right to request treatment records at any time. Adding more regulations only for transgender youth is both unnecessary and discriminatory.

In their [2023 National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People](#), The Trevor Project found that 41% of LGBTQ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year and 56% of LGBTQ young people who wanted mental health care in the past year were not able to get it. At

Kaleidoscope, we provide behavioral health care, including individual and group therapy, to as many young people in need as possible, but we have a consistent waitlist and know that many young people in our community are unable to access our services at all due to fear of being outed to un-affirming family members. Should House Bill 68 pass, these barriers will only increase. If Ohio's legislators are truly interested in "saving adolescents," and protecting the wellbeing of young people, I urge you to consider measures to increase access to behavioral health services, re-invest in Social Work and other behavioral health service providers, and give providers the tools and support necessary to provide quality care to all Ohioans - including our queer and trans young people.

I urge you to join me in opposing House Bill 68.

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