

Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee: We are writing as concerned community advocates who work with and represent hundreds of allies and transgender Ohioans in the Mahoning Valley. We are writing in opposition to the so-called SAFE act and similar bills have been debated in the Ohio General Assembly for nearly three years.

As a civil rights action group, we stand with a large range of voices giving testimony in opposition to this bill as a violation of our core constitutional civil rights. We know that equal opportunity and equal protection under the law are hallmark civil rights, and that transgender Ohioans are just one of the categories of protected minorities who deserve the ability to exercise these rights in our state.

We strongly condemn this bill, which not only illegally removes constitutional protections for equal treatment and access, but also proposes actively harmful interventions into Ohioan's medical treatment, undermines parental rights to decide care for their minor children, and turns our healthcare system into a form of surveillance with punitive implications.

Gender affirming care: We support gender affirming care for the people of the Mahoning Valley. The proposed bill does not reflect medical consensus on gender affirming care and is filled with inaccuracies and misstatements that do not represent the norms of evidence based practice. Gender-affirming care, including hormone therapy and other medically necessary treatments, plays a pivotal role in the well-being and mental health of transgender youth in Ohio. As we know from our direct experiences with community members, Ohioans receive these treatments based on thorough assessments by medical professionals, and each assessment considers the unique needs of each individual.

We also know that this ban will actively harm our most vulnerable children at a time when they need the most support. This proposed ban jeopardizes the mental health and quality of life of transgender minors. Denying them access to treatments that are proven to alleviate gender dysphoria and support their gender identity would only contribute to increased rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide among this vulnerable population. Our Mahoning Valley community already faces a large number of barriers to access to mental health support - and this ban would make life much more difficult for a large number of young people.

You must understand that gender identity is a deeply personal aspect of one's identity, and every individual deserves the right to affirm and express their gender in a way that aligns with their sense of self. Medical decisions should be made in consultation with healthcare providers, families, and the individuals themselves, not dictated by legislative restrictions.

Furthermore, medical organizations and experts—many of whom have given eloquent testimony here—overwhelmingly support gender-affirming care for transgender youth as a critical aspect of comprehensive healthcare. Banning access to these treatments would undermine the expertise of medical professionals and impede their ability to provide necessary care.

Proposed ban on fair access to sports participation: Playing sports as part of public school life offers children not just a chance to engage in physical activity but also a sense of belonging, teamwork, and personal growth. By denying Ohio children the opportunity to participate in sports consistent with their gender identity, this bill would only serve to further isolate and marginalize them.

It's crucial to recognize that transgender individuals have the right to live authentically and should not be denied the same opportunities afforded to their peers. Banning them from sports teams based on their gender identity not only violates their rights but also sends a damaging message that the government believes that they are somehow less deserving or capable.

Moreover, there is no concrete evidence suggesting that transgender individuals participating in sports teams aligned with their gender identity create an unfair advantage. In fact, sports organizations across the country have inclusive policies that have been successfully implemented without compromising the integrity of the game. It is not the children who have to learn how to play together in unity - it is us.

Instead of exclusionary measures, we urge this assembly to focus on creating an environment where all children, regardless of their gender identity, feel safe and supported. We implore you to prioritize empathy, understanding, and fairness in your work making Ohio's policies and practices, so that you may foster a society that celebrates diversity and empowers every individual to thrive.

Our Mahoning Valley community is a diverse, humble constituency and we have found that our community consistently supports transgender young people's rights in the classroom, on the field, and in all their decisions they make with their families. It is part of our core values of promoting fairness and eliminating discrimination that animate so many to come together to ask you to vote against this harmful bill.

Thank you,
Mahoning Valley Queer Action