

Hello,

My chosen name is Sydney Connell and I am staunchly opposed to the passing of House Bill 68. I myself am a trans woman and am more than prepared to state my case to representatives of the Ohio senate. I came out last year and started HRT or hormone replacement therapy on December 1st 2022. The time since I began this incredible journey has been some of the happiest of my life but it has also been fraught with grief. My transition has changed my outlook on myself, on the future and even how I view the present world around me for the better.

My memories of the past however have become a collection of difficult feelings and tragic "what-ifs". I think of how different I might look or feel if I had simply even known about the idea of being trans at a younger age. If I had known that I could choose to be comfortable in my own skin instead of just assuming that conformity and misery were my lot in life.

As a very young child I remember being so full of joy. At that incredible age where the lines of what made boys boys and girls girls wasn't presented to us as an immovable wall. The age where you just see yourself as you. Unrestrained by the concepts that society has made so divisive. I remember the age when I felt my joy begin to slip away, being eroded by the things I was told I was and the things I was told I was not.

The age when someone first told me that it's time to stop hanging out with the girls. The age where you have to start calling pink and purple "girly" colors. When boys suddenly and irrevocably become boys and girls become girls. I am not referring to puberty. I am talking about the age when people older than myself decided that it was time for my life to take a different direction. A predetermined direction that I seemingly had no control over. I found myself terrified of large groups of boys. The way that we were expected to close ourselves off from emotion or face scorn from our peers. Time to stop crying and feeling and wanting to be pretty. I wish I had known that I had a choice to be the beautiful girl I could have been.

I wish I had a chance to access gender affirming care earlier in my life, because I wasted so much time and energy trying to be someone I just wasn't. I wish I could have started my transition before male puberty. No amount of HRT, or voice training or surgery will ever undo the changes puberty did to my body and I am still struggling to make my peace with that. I am struggling to make peace with my broad shoulders and my large hands. With my voice and the very structure of my face. I will have these things for the rest of my life.

Most days it is a challenge to face these realities but on days like today it is my greatest blessing. I have a story to share. I have the knowledge of the things I missed out on and have the chance to come before you today to present that story to you. I have the sort of determination that comes with the loss of possibility. I want each and every child in this great state of ours to have an opportunity to enjoy their lives as whoever they choose to be. As whoever makes them happy and comfortable. To play sports with people of a gender they feel comfortable with. To dress in a way that makes them run to their parents to show off how much they like how they look.

To the parents and lawmakers that hear this I beg of you to think about the lives you destroy when you allow transphobia and the norms of society rule over the lives of your children. Please do not rob our children of the right to choose who they are. Thank you.