

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Government Oversight Committee, thank you for this opportunity to voice my opposition to House Bill 68.

My name is Amy Demlow and I am the parent of a transgender man. My son came out to my husband and I when he was in high school, although in hindsight there were signs from an early age. Aaron had always desired to keep his hair short and dress in boy clothing. When he came out it was not necessarily a surprise but obviously a bit concerning as this was new territory that we had to learn as parents. We didn't have any friends or family with transgender members, but we were lucky enough to find a local LGBTQ group which included other parents of transgender children. Not only was that group a lifesaver for us, the coming out and ability to get affirming health care was a lifesaver for Aaron.

I can't express to you how important gender affirming healthcare is to these kids and how dangerous this bill is families like ours. Gender reassignment surgery simply does not occur with minors. Puberty blockers can provide a lifeline between pre-puberty and puberty, allowing for a pause that does no harm to the child. Prohibiting a mental health professional from treating, let alone diagnosing a minor for gender dysphoria without parental consent is as crazy as telling a doctor that they can't tell their minor parent that they have cancer without parental consent.

I am concerned that the voices of parents supporting their children are being completely ignored in this proposed legislation. This bill restricts parents from having the ability to make decisions that are in the best interest of their child. Parents of trans kids do not make any decision lightly; this is a journey walked in consultation with counselors, psychologists, and medical providers that families rely on and respect. Instead of deferring to the parents and medical team that knows their child (and patient) the best, this law would strip the rights away from parents, putting their child and quite frankly the entire family in harm's way. The mental health effects on trans youth should be of great concern to the committee. Parents want to provide stability for their kids and give them the best chance to succeed and have a happy childhood. There are numerous studies conducted by gender clinics, groups from the American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatricians, and the Endocrine Society, ALL of which conclude that efforts to ban gender-affirming care for transgender and gender diverse youth are danger and will lead to adverse mental health outcomes. My son's depression and suicidal ideation were terrifying for our family – we cannot put families in crisis by stripping away their rights to access affirming medical care.

I also note that part of this bill would prohibit courts from considering a parent's refusal to accept a child's trans identity in custody cases, including misgendering, deadnaming and denying access to counseling for their child. The basic premise of family law is always "do what is in the best interest of the child." There is no reason to restrict a court's ability to look at all relevant facts when making such a determination. The judge, not the legislature, is in the best position to know on a case-by-case basis.

Finally, much to-do is made about trans athletes. The Ohio High School Athletic Association and the National Collegiate Athletic Association have long-stead rules and requirements that allow inclusion on a fair basis for all athletes.

For the sake of all families, including those with young trans people in Ohio just like mine, I beg you: please don't pass this dangerous, discriminatory bill. I urge you to oppose HB 68 to protect our state's youth and their parents.