

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and all other members of the Government Oversight Committee, thank you for reading my testimony as you consider House Bill 68. I write to you as a spouse, a scientist, a medical researcher, and a transgender, non-binary person. I was born in the early 1990s in Western Kentucky. I grew up on a small farm, not unlike the many farms in rural Ohio. I had a near picturesque childhood. In the summers I played outside with my brother and helped tend to crops and farm animals. My family and community gave me plenty of love, nourishment, and attention. I never wanted for anything. I was not bullied or abused. My childhood was about as close as you could get to the American dream. And, I was and am trans. From the age of 4 I expressed that I was not a girl. I was jealous of kids with names like “Jesse” and “Alex.” Any time I saw a gender ambiguous person in media I would become entranced. I can’t tell you how many times I watched the first 20 minutes of Fried Green Tomatoes because I felt seen when I saw young Idgie Threadgoode in a suit. But, it was the 1990s, I was the child of a tirebuilder and an elementary school teacher, and we were in the middle of the Bible Belt. My parents didn’t have the words to explain what I was expressing and our conservative Christian community didn’t either. So, they called me a “tomboy” and hoped I would grow out of it. I went through elementary, middle, high school, and college knowing I was different but not knowing how. I developed anxiety and very low self-esteem in high school because of this feeling of not fitting the way everyone else did. I wondered why I was in a body that didn’t feel right, wondered why I couldn’t have a flat chest like the boys in my class, wondered why we had to focus so much on gender at all. But, I had no one to talk to about how I was feeling, so I pushed those feelings away and shut myself off to them. It wasn’t until I was well into PhD candidacy that I found out what I had felt all my life had a name. I was transgender. I was non-binary. Since that realization in my mid-20s I have socially and medically transitioned and finally feel at home in my body.

I wrote this lengthy paragraph about my personal journey to illustrate for you that forcing transgender children to wait until they are over 18 to transition will not keep them from being trans. I’m living proof of that. Life circumstances forced me to wait until my mid-20s to transition. I bear the scars of that wait and I didn’t even know that what I was experiencing was gender dysphoria. Imagine how much worse it would have been for me if I had known I was transgender, but couldn’t access the lifesaving measures of mental healthcare or hormone blockers. We don’t have to imagine it; we know from extensive research that transgender youth who do not have access to gender-affirming spaces have higher rates of suicide attempts than transgender youth who have access to gender-affirming spaces. We know that the suicide attempt rate by LGBTQ youth who have high familial social support is 6% and that the suicide attempt rate for LGBTQ youth who have low to moderate familial social support is 16%. HB68 will not keep Ohio youth from being trans, but it will likely keep many transgender youth in Ohio from living to see adulthood. I implore you to vote no on HB68. Transgender youth in Ohio deserve to live into adulthood. They deserve access to the care that will help them feel at home in their bodies and their minds. They deserve our protection, not persecution.