

December 4, 2023
Columbus, OH 43202

Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee,

My name is Katerina Ehas. I am 52 years old, I live in Columbus, Ohio. My family moved to Northeast Ohio in 1980, and I have lived in Ohio for all but 16 months of the nearly 44 years since. I am an alumna of Bowling Green State University, class of Spring 1995 with a BS in Social Studies Education, and of The Ohio State University, class of Fall 1997 with an MA in Geography. I am the granddaughter of a former member of the Ohio House and the Ohio Senate, and the daughter of a former councilor from the City of Twinsburg. My roots run deep in Ohio, to which one side of my family immigrated nearly 120 years ago, and the other side of which were among the early settlers of Mahoning County. Despite being born out of state, I have a strong, abiding love of the Buckeye State and my status as a Buckeye. It is in this capacity that I testify to you.

When I received my BS in 1995, I was aware at the time that I had a transgender identity, and I knew that being open about this would have prevented me from my intended goal of teaching the next generation as my job would not be protected. To this day such discrimination is still considered to be protected in Ohio, which is very unfortunate as it infringes on my inalienable rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. This is why it pains me that HB 68 comes before the committee, seeking to further infringe on those rights that all Americans justly hold so dear. This bill would prevent parents from following the recommended course of treatment, one that is approved of by at least 30 professional organizations in the medical and psychological communities.

Youth who struggle with transgender identities often are bullied by their peers, no matter how openly they express their identity, because the discomfort is evident in the way they interact with their peers. This is something that I know from personal experiences made worse by the social hysteria surrounding HIV/AIDS and its prevalence in the LGBTQ+ community in that period. When I was asked to speak with a counselor due to the regularity with which I ended up in the office as a result of these encounters with my peers and their frequency, I mentioned my identity, and I was told that it was a phase that I would grow out of. After 40 years I have yet to grow out of it, and I have been much happier since beginning appropriate treatment in 1999. I wish that I would have had access to this care 15 years earlier, before my natural puberty changed my body in ways that will require thousands of dollars in treatment to correct, and still will not be able to correct everything I wish it could.

One other aspect of HB 68 involves the participation of transgender students in sports. Research shows that there is no appreciable difference between pre-pubescent boys and girls that cannot be accounted for by some other factor, such as height. Any ban prior to puberty is wholly inappropriate and counter to the science on the matter. And in banning access to treatment you are making it so that they would not be able to stop that puberty, making the ban necessary due to your own actions and not any fault of the child. This ban is a solution in search of a problem as it would only impact a small number of students, barely in the teens, among the thousands of students who compete in Ohio.

In closing, this law is wholly unnecessary in Ohio. It is seeking to legislate to parents the choices the authors wish them to make, rather than the choices they reach in conjunction with the medical professionals entrusted with the care of their children. I urge you all, with every drop of my scarlet and grey blood, to vote NO on HB 68. Ohio has more important issues than pushing out children away by making their lives more difficult.