

I am a 34-year-old Ohio native, and I have lived in Columbus all my life. I attended Duxberry Elementary before we moved to Hilliard, where I attended Hilliard Sixth Grade Station, Memorial Middle School, Davidson High School, and ultimately went on to graduate with a B.A. and M.A. in Linguistics from The Ohio State University in 2012. I now live in Upper Arlington with my partner, and work in downtown Columbus.

In all that time, I knew that I had difficulty fitting in as male but I didn't understand why. At that time, the language and cultural understanding did not exist for transgender people, so I never considered that being transgender was even a viable option for me. Assigned male at birth and raised as male, I was a target for bullying because of my inability to relate to other male students and my desire to express my femininity. I only talked to others about these feelings at my own peril. If I told my parents, I didn't know if they would support me or throw me out of the house as I had heard happened to other minors in my situation. I didn't have affirming and expansive conversations about gender from educators or healthcare providers, in fact it wasn't discussed at all. I was afraid that if I did talk about these feelings, that I might be sent to conversion therapy or worse. And so, I hid myself away and buried my feelings of discomfort with my body and misaligned gender role—also called gender dysphoria—until many years later.

Proponents of HB 68 claim that the gender dysphoria experienced by minors will simply go away as they mature into adulthood. This is simply not the case, and it only got worse for me over time as I continued to deny and repress the truth, that I was and am a transgender woman. In college, the pain of forcing myself to be someone I was not deepened, and I shifted into survival mode. I was a competitive swimmer in high school, which was incredibly beneficial to my physical and mental health as sports are for all young people. When I entered college, I didn't even try out. I didn't consider it an option because of the discomfort I felt in my body and the likelihood of ostracism associated with expressing myself in an authentic but non-normative way. At my lowest point during my sophomore year, I contemplated suicide frequently. Thankfully, through the support of friends and counseling, I understood that I was not defective as I had been conditioned to believe throughout my life. I realized that it was possible for someone like me to lead a happy life and to be proud of who I am. It is not an exaggeration to say that gender affirming healthcare saved my life.

Still, it was not an easy process, and I still did not consider the possible benefits of medical intervention such as hormone replacement therapy. Although I had access to a lot of information on the Internet, I was very nervous about pursuing gender affirming care because of the fear that healthcare providers would not be supportive. When I met my current doctor in 2018, who has been a provider of gender affirming care for decades, she asked me questions centered around my experience rather than prescriptively assigning treatment to me. It became clear that hormone replacement therapy was the appropriate treatment for my gender dysphoria, and after 5 years on estrogen I can honestly say I've never felt better than I do now.

Suicide rates among transgender youth are already disproportionately high. According to a 2020 study by Ashley Austin et al. in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 82% of transgender

people have contemplated suicide and 40% have attempted suicide. HB 68 is not about experimentation. Proponents claim that puberty blockers and hormones are dangerous and new, but these claims are made without knowing what the treatment options are or how they are administered. They are well-documented, lifesaving treatments that are only undertaken with the support of parents for patients that have shown a consistent and persistent gender identity and are stable with respect to their mental health. I am one of the lucky ones. I survived the silence, the fear, and the isolation of being in the closet. If I had access to gender affirming care such as therapy, hormones, and puberty blockers earlier in my life, and if I could have participated in sports as my authentic self, I can only imagine the pain that I could have been spared in my childhood and adolescence.

Austin, Ashley et al. "Suicidality Among Transgender Youth: Elucidating the Role of Interpersonal Risk Factors." *Journal of interpersonal violence* vol. 37,5-6 (2022): NP2696-NP2718. doi:10.1177/0886260520915554