

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, and members of the Government Oversight Committee:

My name is Halle Martin. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony today.

I voted Republican for most of my life.

The Republican party I used to know believed in individual empowerment. Now they want to take away the power of Ohio citizens to make medical decisions. When it came to COVID vaccine mandates, many lawmakers believed it was their personal right to make medical decisions for themselves and on behalf of their children. I agree. Ohio citizens SHOULD have the right to make medical decisions for themselves and their families with the guidance of their medical providers. That includes the families of transgender children. But Ohio Republicans seek to take away the rights of individuals to make these decisions. Interestingly, in a November Data for Progress survey, 59% of Republican voters participating indicated that a minor's parents – not lawmakers - should be able to make the final decision regarding gender affirming care for minors.

The Republican party I used to know believed in limited government. Now Republicans are trying to substitute their judgment for that of medical experts. Access to gender-affirming healthcare is essential – even life-saving – for trans youth. Gender-affirming interventions are based on decades of clinical experience and research; they are NOT experimental. ALL major medical associations have supported the provision of gender-affirming health care as medically necessary care. But Ohio Republicans seek to substitute their judgment for that of the Ohio Board of Medicine and physicians. Interestingly, in the previously referenced survey, only 9% of Republicans believed that elected state lawmakers were most trustworthy to develop policies and regulations on gender affirming care for minors and only 16% of Republicans believed that state lawmakers should make the final decision regarding gender affirming care for minors.

The Republican party I used to know eschewed superfluous regulation. The transgender sports ban is unnecessary. OHSAA and NCAA have long had policies to address this issue. They allow transgender athletes to participate AND prohibit men from entering women's events. OHSAA's policy specifically recognizes that "transgender student athletes should have equal opportunity to participate in sports" AND recognizes "the integrity of women's sports should be preserved." Those two things are not at odds. OHSAA has successfully maintained that balance for years. In Ohio, a transgender girl can't compete unless she's been on hormone therapy for a year or medically demonstrates that she doesn't possess a physical advantage. But Ohio Republicans unnecessarily seek a blanket ban rather than allowing OHSAA to deal with athletes on a case-by-case basis as it has done successfully for years.

The Republican party I used to know believed in fairness and equality of opportunity. This bill prevents transgender girls from participating in sports that contribute to their well-being. Medical experts state that any physical advantages a transgender female may have had

due to her prior testosterone levels dissipate after about one year of hormones. The assumption that a transgender girl would have a competitive advantage outside the range of variability that already exists among cisgender female athletes is simply unsupported by medical evidence. So this bill isn't about fairness. Rather, Ohio Republicans have joined a nationwide campaign by a few outside ultra-conservative groups to alienate transgender people.

The Republican party I used to know believed in the economic good of this State. If Ohio citizens prosper, the State prospers. If Ohio attracts an educated workforce and new jobs, the State prospers. Ohio is becoming so hostile to individual liberties young people will not want to come to Ohio for work or school – not to mention the families that will need to move. I am not alone in this concern. Ohio employers Abercrombie & Fitch, Cardinal Health, Intel and Nestle are only a few of the signatories to the HRC Statement Opposing Anti-LGBTQ State Legislation. That statement said, specifically, that laws targeting transgender youth can make it “exceedingly difficult for [employers] to recruit the most qualified candidates” and “place substantial burdens on families of ... employees”. They said, “As we make ... decisions about where to invest and grow, these issues can influence our decisions. **America’s business community has consistently communicated to lawmakers ... that such laws have a negative effect on our employees, ... customers, .. competitiveness, and state and national economies.**” But Ohio Republicans are passing laws that alienate families, businesses, prospective employees and prospective students from Ohio. Ohio Republicans seek to sacrifice the State’s economic interests to bully a small minority.

Sadly, I understand how easy it is to be swept up by the rhetoric. These outside political operatives excel at misinformation and obfuscating and championing their anti-transgender agenda. Ohio Republicans have taken the bait and staked their reputations on the belief that targeting transgender youth is a political winner. As we see from the Data for Progress survey, that assumption may be suspect. And in any event, the idea that you’re “protecting girls” and “saving children” is illusory. Neither the House nor this Committee have used these hearings to study the issue’s scope or science, or policies and protections already in place, or to consider the motivation behind this nationwide tide of anti-trans bills. Instead, you’ve had perfunctory hearings. In the end, it appears that the Ohio Republican party has decided to send a strong message that transgender people are subhuman. That is NOT the Republican party I once knew.