



AMERICAN ATHEISTS

November 30 2023

The Honorable Sen. Kristina D. Roegner
Chair, Senate Government Oversight Committee
Ohio Statehouse
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Re: OPPOSITION to HB 68, a bill to deny medical treatment for trans youth and deny participation in public school athletics activities to trans students

Dear Chairperson Roegner and Members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee,

American Atheists, on behalf of its more than 2,000 constituents in Ohio, writes in opposition to HB 68, a controversial bill which would intensify systemic discrimination against trans youth in Ohio. HB 68 would strip away necessary health care and support for an already vulnerable population, and it would introduce unnecessary and harmful prejudice into Ohio's school athletics programs. We urge you to reject this profoundly stigmatizing and harmful bill.

American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the "wall of separation" between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheism and atheists are accepted as members of our nation's communities and where casual bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America. We reject efforts to undermine the support and well-being of gender diverse youth based on the religious beliefs of lawmakers.

Banning gender affirming medical care is not supported by science and would actively harm Ohio youth.

For the majority of trans young people, transition consists of social transition, that is changing one's gender presentation, name, and/or pronouns, rather than medical intervention. For those for whom medical intervention is appropriate, best practice medical care for trans youth simply delays puberty until young people are old enough to make their own decisions about their lived gender. This care is not undertaken lightly; it follows a lengthy assessment and period of treatment and results from informed and collaborative decision-making by the young person, their parents, and medical professionals, often with multiple specialties. However, this bill aims to strip away access to this often life-saving care from trans young people, heedless of the negative impact this will have on these vulnerable youth.

Trans children, like all children, have the best chance to thrive when they are supported and can get the health care they need. Instead, in the name of protecting these youth, this bill would restrict access to the care they need. It displays a fundamental lack of understanding of trans young people and bans best practice medical care for trans youth that is backed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, and other leading health authorities.

Trans youth, their parents, and their healthcare providers, not politicians, should decide what care is in the best interest of a patient in accordance with current medical best practices. It can be difficult to understand what it's like to have a trans child, especially if you've never met someone who is trans. Parents of trans children, like most parents, simply want to do what is best for their child, including working with doctors to ensure that their child has access to the best care possible.

With this legislation, lawmakers are putting the lives and well-being of trans youth at risk. Denying best practice medical care and support to trans youth can be life-threatening. It has been shown to contribute to depression, social isolation, self-hatred, risk of self-harm and suicidal behavior, and more. More than 1 in 3 trans youth have reported attempting suicide within the past year, compared to only 7 percent of their cisgender peers.¹ But research shows that trans youth whose families support their gender identity experience a 66% decrease in suicidal thoughts, a 76% decrease in suicide attempts, and significant increases in self-esteem and general health.² Being a kid is hard enough. We don't need politicians making it even harder for kids who are trans by interfering with personal medical decisions.

Stigmatizing trans kids by restricting school athletics to sex assigned at birth isolates trans students and undermines their education and socialization.

HB 68 would also harm trans youth and young adults by requiring schools, colleges and universities, and athletics associations to segregate trans athletes and prevent them participating in athletics in accordance with their lived gender. Supporters of this bill insist, without evidence, that segregation by sex assigned at birth is necessary to ensure fairness in athletic competition. However, by doing so they are willing to sacrifice young people who already face a great deal of discrimination.

This legislation would make trans students far more susceptible to bullying and harassment in Ohio due to state-mandated exclusion. The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey described the rampant bullying and harassment that trans students already face, concluding that:

- Fifty-four percent (54%) of those who were out or perceived as trans in K–12 were verbally harassed, and 24% were physically attacked; and

¹ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/data-on-trans-youth/>

² <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-015-1867-2>

- Seventeen percent (17%) of those who were out or perceived as trans left a K–12 school because the mistreatment was so bad.³

HB 68 stigmatizes trans students and makes them more vulnerable to bullying and harassment. The overwhelming majority of trans students, like most young people, don't play at elite levels. They just want to participate in school sports with their peers. Athletics bans like HB 68 are not in the best interest of our students. When it comes to school sports, trans youth, like other students, deserve the same chances to learn teamwork, sportsmanship, leadership, and self-discipline, and to build a sense of belonging with their peers. When we tell trans students that they can't participate in sports with their classmates, they miss out on this important childhood experience and all the lessons it teaches. Every student deserves the opportunity to participate in sports and benefit from the lessons that come with that opportunity.

Ohio has a clear choice in this matter. The Legislature will either choose to intensify the unnecessary victimization of a historically marginalized demographic of students or to foster empathy and diversity and set a precedent of equality by rejecting HB 68. Interscholastic sports encourage teamwork, inclusivity, self-confidence and determination amongst the students that participate, and thus, athletic opportunities should be equally available and encouraged for all students.

We urge you, please do not contribute to the discrimination against trans young people by passing this bill. Do not pass this intolerant legislation under false conceptions of "safety" and "fairness." This bill is unfair and it will make trans youth far less safe.

For these reasons, we ask you to reject HB 68. If you should have any questions regarding American Atheists' opposition to HB 68, please contact me at rhofmann@atheists.org

Sincerely,



Rob Hofmann
State Policy Manager
American Atheists

CC: All Members of the Ohio Senate Government Oversight Committee

³ James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M. (2016). The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey. Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality.