

HB 68 Opposition Testimony
Kate Krueck

My name is Kate Krueck. I am a pediatrician who has been practicing in the Columbus area for just over 20 years. More importantly, I am a mother of 4 incredible children, ranging in ages from 13 to 20 years. Like every parent in this room thinks of their own kids, I think my kids are amazing. Regardless of the challenges that they have faced and the medications they have to take to keep them well. Regardless of their skin color, or their religion, or who they love. And regardless of their names, their pronouns, or the shape of their genitals. They are not perfect, but they are human, and they all deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Their humanity has earned them the right to be who they are, whatever shape that takes.

Unlike most, if not all of the parents in this room, one of my children is transgender. I hope today that I am able to help you see the human behind the gender. My oldest child Logan was 16 years old when they attempted suicide. You'll notice that I struggle with pronouns, because like you, and like Logan, I am not perfect. I make mistakes. A lot. And each time I make a mistake, I apologize, correct my mistake, and try to do better next time. Mistakes are how we learn to do better. I teach my kids, the parents of my patients, and other pediatricians that nothing ever improves when mistakes are not tolerated. Logan will make mistakes, as will every one of us, as we all learn to traverse this life we have been given. All we can hope is that one of these mistakes does not end a life.

On that day in October, when Logan was 16, there were no obvious warning signs. Logan was an elite soccer player, who was being recruited to play D3 soccer in college. They cared about others' feelings and comfort more than their own. They were, and still are, a scholar, graduating high school with honors and maintaining a 4.0 now in their sophomore year of college. They were always polite, always did the right thing, and never complained. After Logan's attempt was aborted by a friend on the phone, they called 911 from their bedroom, steps away from the room where my husband and I were sleeping, and met the ambulance in our driveway without waking us up. I had no idea that Logan had thoughts of suicide until they were admitted to the psychiatric crisis department in the middle of the night that day in October. And I count myself incredibly lucky for that awful night in October.

Suicide is an impulsive, irreversible act that ends a human life forever. Because of that night in October, I had the fortune to learn from mistakes such as missed signs and messed up priorities. I got the opportunity to learn who my baby had grown to be, which was different from the tiny newborn who was defined only by a vagina. It wasn't always easy to reconstruct my vision of a baby with a vagina into the adolescent before me, with a new name and changed pronouns, but they were still the same incredible person. Through extensive therapy, Logan disclosed that her suicidal ideation stemmed from severe gender dysphoria in a world that does not tolerate gender diversity. As a pediatrician, I knew that the single best way to keep Logan alive was to respect their gender identity by using their preferred name and their self identified pronouns. When someone says their name is Thomas but they go by Jack, we call them Jack. We don't ask to see proof of legal name change and check genitals to ensure their name is

appropriate for what's between their legs. We extend the common courtesy of calling them by their preferred name.

While suicide is an impulsive, irreversible act, gender affirming care is the polar opposite. It involves extended time, sometimes years, to allow the individual to explore their own identity, on their own timeline, in a safe and non judgmental space. In minors, gender affirming care is reversible. We do not perform surgeries on minors. Full stop. Puberty blockers buy time for an individual to explore their core identity to prevent the need for potentially harmful and potentially irreversible therapies. And eventually puberty blockers are stopped. At which point, puberty occurs. The effects of gender affirming hormonal therapy are largely reversible as well. The effects that may not be reversible after extended, years long use, such as facial hair growth and growth of the Adam's Apple, are certainly outweighed by the risks of non-treatment, namely death by suicide. In reality, gender affirming care is a replacement for an impulsive and irreversible act, a reversible and extensive process that buys kids enough time to address the underlying causes of suicidal ideation and heal. And it does so at no harm to the patient or to society.

Every pediatrician repeats the Hippocratic Oath upon graduation from medical school. First, do no harm. The harm here is clear. Harm is letting kids die by suicide because we choose not to offer them available treatment. Harm is allowing politicians to determine appropriate medical treatment for vulnerable populations who have been pushed to the margins of society. What is not at all clear, what does not appear to exist at all, is the harm that is caused by pediatricians following the standard of care set out by our national governing bodies in providing the best and safest treatment available for children who are suffering from gender dysphoria.

We all will continue to make mistakes. As much as each parent wants to do everything possible for their children to prevent all mistakes, as adults we recognize that without mistakes, our kids will never learn for themselves how to be successful. When a suicidal kid makes a "mistake", the result can be catastrophic and absolute. If a child receiving gender affirming care decides such care was a mistake, they discontinue puberty blockers or hormonal treatments and continue on with their life, in the knowledge that they fully explored their identity. If we do not provide these kids with a time-buying option, if we cannot tolerate any mistakes, we tell them that death is a better option than making a mistake. For the love of kids, all kids...Out of respect for human rights and human life...We must tolerate the potential for mistakes as a necessary part of living and learning.