

Good afternoon.

My name is Beth Long, I am a life-long resident of Ohio. I grew up in Upper Arlington, I went to college, met a boy, got married, went to grad school, found a job in a field I am passionate about, had two kids... life has been really good. My parents were married for 50 years, my mother passed away a few years ago, but my dad still lives nearby. I have great, strong familial relationships. I have had so many opportunities. But I know my experience is not that of many. I have so much privilege – some earned, some inherited, some probably undeserved. Even with all of this privilege, I struggle with anxiety and depression. My children have had friends attempt suicide, die from overdose. I've been in an emergency room with one of my children who attempted suicide. Both of my kids have both been in and out of counseling for a variety of situations and challenges – self-harm, eating issues, suicidal ideation. At times their lives have literally depended on their access to mental health services. The kids are not ok.

A little over a year ago, I decided to apply for a position on the Kaleidoscope Youth Center board. I had done some soul searching and decided that I might feel a little less depressed or anxious if I could do something meaningful, be helpful in some way beyond taking lunch to teachers or sending money to various causes. The more I thought about what I could do, the more I thought about the people most at risk right now, most in danger, most in need of support – the more I kept coming back to thoughts of our young people, and most urgently the young queer people in our communities. This process brought me to Kaleidoscope. Kaleidoscope Youth Center strives to help all young people feel safe, supported and valued, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. My service with this board, and learning more about how brave and beautiful the KYC youth are, as led me here today. I've never done anything like this before, but here I am asking you to let this bill die.

LGBTQIA+ youth face bullying, discrimination and rejection on so many fronts. These are young people facing a wave of anti-equality bills nationwide, denying them access to safety and dignity. There is no reason for it. This bill, House Bill 68, is one such bill that seeks to deprive young Ohioians equal access to health care, medical treatment and recreational activities.

I also find it absurd that legislation to ban transgender girls and women access to sport competitions has been conjoined to this legislation. If someone wants to compete, let them compete. Sports have been vital to one of my children's sense of self and purpose. Every child deserves access to activities that help build physical, emotional and mental health and well-being.

There is so much work that needs done in Ohio – we need legislation to improve access to affordable housing, aid for veterans, an improved funding mechanism for public education, improved transportation alternatives and updated infrastructure for modern technology. Why are we even here defending access to basic medical care and the ability to play sports with a team of peers?

Transgender and non-binary children and young people exist. They are not a threat. There is nothing to be afraid of. There is no reason to be spending this much time and energy to strip them of rights others get to enjoy. Why focus on what divides or differentiates? I believe it is time to stop such efforts to pit us against one another. Please do not give this legislation any more time or energy, just let it go. Thank you.