

My name is Bridget McConaughy and I am here to urge you to not pass HB 68. I want to start off by showing respect to my father who passed away this September. I'm actually here because of him. You see, early in his treatment for renal cancer I was ready to step away from the political organizing I'd been doing for the last five years. But when I told my father this he said "Bridget, if you have the opportunity to help the LGBT community, then I think you have the obligation to do that." Was it because he was woke? No! He was as conservative as they come! He'd been a Republican since Reagan, and voted for Trump back in 2016. But he knew that my community was important to me. So dad, here I am, fulfilling that obligation.

Let me backup a bit. I grew up in Anderson Township, right outside of Cincinnati. I attended St. Xavier High School like my father before me, a Jesuit school for young men. I didn't know the word transgender, but I sure knew that I was not male like the rest of my peers. But if I came out back then I likely would have been expelled. So like many young catholic teens, I tried to ignore my identity, hoping that I could suppress it until I was straight again.

This did not work. I was plagued by insomnia throughout all of my teen years. Night after night I dealt with the suicidal thoughts. I couldn't look at myself and give myself the love I deserved. This culminated in my sophomore year of college, when my attempts to ignore my identity kept me up for six straight days. No doctor visit, no sleeping medication, no herbal tea would help me sleep. And in the haze of that arduous week I kept returning to how I was trapped. I was ready to die up until the point I finally accepted myself.

After this awful experience I resolved to come out as a transgender woman. I'll never forget the night I came out to my father. I had spent my whole life worrying he would reject me, cut me off like many other parents do to their transgender children. But instead he said to me "I'm not going to pretend like I understand this. But my life is better with you in it. So give me time and I

will learn.” And learn he did. He started using my name, pronouns, supporting me throughout the whole transition.

Dad helped me get my first doctor’s visit. I received gender affirming treatment from Cincinnati Children’s adolescent clinic. My doctor went over all the risks, fertility effects and all the other details needed to make sure I could give knowing consent. This was a safe space where I, and many of the children here today, could ask questions, and get real answers. This bill would target the program that they have responsibly run for decades.

The medicine my doctor prescribed has allowed me to change my perception of who I am. I am able to look at myself and love who I am without the repulsion I used to feel. I’ve been able to form meaningful relationships with long term partners who accept the woman I am.

I want to circle back to the importance of acceptance. We put everything on the line when we come out to our parents. After all, approximately 40% of unhoused youth are queer. Others are sent off to be abused at conversion therapy camps. My friends have been tortured at these camps. And then they had to come home, and pretend like they were cured, just so they could feel the love of their parents again. I could have ended up like them had I not had such a compassionate family, especially my father. He had the compassion to understand me.

That’s the sort of compassion I’m asking you to show these kids today. To echo my father, If you want to represent them you have an obligation to try to understand them. I mean, look at how brave they are. I’d like to take some time to applaud the courage of all those young trans people who are here to speak today. I wish I had their courage at their age to not only live their authentic lives, but to stand up for their lives here before the legislature that seems poised to take away their lifelines.

So let's take some time and listen to what they are asking for. These kids just want to feel comfortable and safe in their bodies. But moreover they want to live. This medication helped end my suicidal thoughts. It can help do the same for them. But a yes vote on this bill, is a vote for suicide.

So please vote no to stop House Bill 68 from moving forward, and let's start a real dialogue so that we can all better help these children through the challenges they are facing.