

Opponent Testimony for Sub. H. B. No. 68
Senate Government Oversight Committee
December 5, 2023

Alison Pollina, Parent

Chair Kristina D. Roegner, Vice Chair Niraj Antani, Ranking Member Paula Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Alison Pollina [she/her]. I am a parent of a non-binary child. We reside in Geauga County, Ohio

I am writing today in strong opposition of H. B. No. 68. This legislation is not just *dangerous* to children like mine – it has the potential to be deadly. If enacted, this bill will most certainly lead to increased suicidality among an already astonishingly high-risk group.

The provisions regarding gender-affirming mental healthcare are particularly distressing to me. The government of the state of Ohio has no business involving itself in private medical matters. The measures in this bill create a frightening move toward totalitarian extremism. It upsets me deeply that my tax dollars are being used to create and debate legislation that amounts to governmental bullying and would severely limit my rights as a parent to ensure that my child has the care that they need.

When my now 15-year-old child, (who uses they/them pronouns and is also on the Autism spectrum) came out to me as non-binary two years ago, my first thoughts were of their safety. Bullying and conservative Christian extremism are rampant in the small rural community in which we reside. My second thought was that we would need the full support of their mental healthcare team more than ever.

It is important here to assert that my child and my family has not “chosen” my child’s gender identity. I further assert that my child was born to be who they are. Statistically speaking, their Autism diagnosis makes this gender experience far more common.

According to Autism.org:

“Contemporary research on the intersection of autism, sexuality, and gender identity asserts that autistic individuals are more likely to identify as LGBTQIA+ than the neurotypical population. Similarly, the prevalence of autism is higher among transgender people than cisgender individuals. Autistic individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ face increased discrimination in access to care, cultural stigmas, and violence. Such experiences can drive poor mental and suicidality which are already high among autistic and LGBTQIA+ communities.

To better support autistic LGBTQIA+ individuals, we must accept, validate, and listen to the lived experiences of this community. By doing so, we can learn how best to support and assist family, friends, and loved ones who experience this intersection.”

It has been a great relief to have our local community mental health agency provide compassionate, gender-affirming care. My child has experienced serious bouts of suicidality and anxiety. They have endured bullying at school that has crippled their self-confidence. In affirming their gender experience through counseling and through an accepting home environment, my child's outlook has brightened considerably. Their depression has lessened considerably since they first shared their non-binary identity. I don't think my child would be alive today if the resources we have in place were denied to them or delayed for mandatory "testing" of various pre-existing medical conditions as proposed.

While my family has made the decision not to pursue gender-affirming hormones at this stage in my child's transition, I have formed a community with families who have elected that option. These families have weighed these options carefully and have made decisions together that are best for their family. These children are thriving because their parents were free to make the best decisions possible for them. They will have a chance to become adults rather than dying from co-morbid mental health issues like suicide and substance abuse that stem from having to deny and hide who they are.

I am inspired by my child and the children that they have befriended through their gender identity support group. These kids are unafraid to be themselves, to express their truest identities, despite tremendous social pressure and the real and constant threat of violence. If we all could be ourselves so fully, the world would not be such an angry place.

The citizens of Ohio recently voted Yes on Issue One, affirming that private medical decisions should be just that: private. Not subject to legislation. This is the will of the people.

H. B. No. 68 is an unacceptable overreach of government authority. It will be harmful to my family and many other families as well. It will result in youth dying by suicide and substance abuse.

I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote no on H. B. No. 68

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Alison Pollina