



Representative Anita Somani, MD

11th House District

House Bill 68 Opponent Testimony

Thank you, Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, for giving me the opportunity to speak as a fellow member of the Statehouse and as an OB/GYN who cares for patients. I submit testimony today in opposition to House Bill 68.

How would you feel if every day you woke up to face a world that did not value you, did not see you as a person and did not even believe that you should be alive? How would you feel if you were simply a tool for a political agenda aimed at getting votes through disinformation? Trust me when I tell you that is how many of my transgender patients feel.

They wake up every morning trying to be part of a world that will treat them as their authentic self. Instead of working to help them we do the exact opposite by not allowing them to testify when they show up at the State house, not taking the time to listen to their parents who align with many of you when it comes to their political parties and not respecting the experts who follow evidence-based medicine and guidelines. It is easy to be a Google expert, but it takes years of training to become a medical expert.

When you talk about protecting children by legislation that is ultimately harmful, you increase the risk of violence against these groups. Here in Ohio, we have had trans people be escorted to speak because legislators brought in abusive parents to testify for the bill. There are other circumstances where people who are brave enough to share their stories have their tires slashed, are followed home, and threatened online and in person.

We have all seen increasing episodes of violence via NeoNazi groups at drag shows, Pride flags being burned during Pride month, and those incidents that are not reported out of fear all because the Statehouse condones this behavior with the bills that we prioritize. Do you truly believe in protecting children? Consider the risk of suicide is increased when the appropriate care is not given, or a condition is used politically to score points.

Puberty blockers have been used for many conditions including precocious puberty and to help with height. But this bill would ban the use of puberty blockers only for transgender care. All three of these pediatric populations have mental health issues like depression and anxiety or suicidal thoughts because of their condition but only one of these groups is being discriminated against. As a gynecologist who does surgery for a variety of conditions, we see patients who experience pain and bleeding with periods or those whose breasts are too big or too small. We do not ban hysterectomies in these patients or stop teenage boys or girls from having breast reductions or enhancements. Gender affirming care is a continuum and surgery is only one of many options.

Unfortunately, this bill would ban every type of gender affirming care. You have had detransitioners testify in support of this bill, but there are an equal amount of detransitioners who do not support this bill. The care that adolescents receive is reversible and the whole issue is not about care but who gets to make that decision. Just as in the case of abortion, Ohioans do NOT want politicians making health care decisions and this should be left to the patient, parent, and health care provider in the case of minors.

Another point that is being used to ban gender affirming care is that Europe is doing it. Europe doesn't ban gender affirming care. They are doing more research and in some instances are expanding care. No legal prohibitions have been put into place in Europe as is happening here in the US. Doctors in Europe are still able to provide care and unlike the US are not being criminalized or facing the prospect of losing their license as they are here.

When I care for patients, I do not care for them based on their political party nor do people develop gender identities based on their political or religious beliefs. We saw parents that were Republican and conservative as well as those who were Democrats testify that gender affirming care was critical to their child's mental health and well-being. If we truly believe that parents know what is best for their kids based on the support given to other bills, how can we discount these parents who testified that gender affirming care was best for their kids.

So, what happens if we pass this bill, and it becomes law? Let's look at Arkansas, the first state to ban transgender care. The federal court just permanently blocked this law yesterday, saying that it violates the constitutional rights of transgender youth, their parents, and their medical providers. For those who believe in fiscal responsibility and not wasting taxpayers' money I would advise that you oppose this bill not only because it is a terrible bill but also it will waste taxpayer money defending a bill that takes away constitutional rights and is indefensible. Similar bills in Florida, Indiana, Alabama, and Texas have already been struck down.

Yesterday, the U.S. News and World Report announced that Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center is now the top children's hospital in the nation. Today, we are debating legislation that will threaten to take away these top physicians' medical licenses, prevent them from providing their patients with the care they need, and most likely will force these physicians out of the state. Passing this law will create confusion and chaos for the families and these medical providers.

This will be in the same way that abortion care became inaccessible to so many and led to an increase in maternal deaths when women were forced to carry pregnancies that risked their lives. My physician colleagues and I are already seeing an increase in suicide attempts among transgender youth with hospitalizations on the rise just because of the legislation. Imagine the heartache and tragedy that will ensue if we pass this bill. As of today, my colleagues on the committee have received over 11,000 emails asking to vote NO and only around 800 urging us to vote yes.

You may consider me a politician, but I am a physician first and do not support the belief that wedge issues and marginalizing a subsegment of people is the way to win votes. We need to care for all Ohioans, not just the ones who vote for us.

Thank you again for allowing me to submit testimony opposing House Bill 68. I urge you all to vote against this bill.