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Outpatient Therapist

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1. [The 2019 National School Climate Survey | GLSEN](#)
2. [The Trevor Project: 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#)
3. [Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Clients](#)

DECEMBER 2023

Ohio Senate Government Oversight Committee
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

Chairman Roegner, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Ohio Senate Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 68. It is with deep gratitude that I express to you today my firm opposition; a position I proudly stand in, as it is founded by evidence and fact based practices, my own expertise, and my experience as a therapist specialized in providing Gender Affirming Care.

My name is Lee Tepper and I use they/them/theirs pronouns. I am a life-long Ohioan and a non-binary Independently Licensed Social Worker serving Ohioans as an Outpatient Behavioral Health Practitioner.

I specialize in the clinical care of LGBTQIA+ persons to include young people, adults, and families; I provide evidence-based, ethical, and professional services rooted in best practices of Trauma Informed Care, Gender Affirming Care, and a Person-Centered Approach. Currently, I serve on the Board of Directors of Ohio's largest and longest standing organization to serve and support LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults, Kaleidoscope Youth Center.

I am testifying to offer my expertise, clinical perspective, and opposition to this harmful, discriminatory, and ill-informed bill. **This bill directly damages and risks the lives of our young people, creating a ripple effect of harm for all individuals;** parents, teachers, school staff, mental health professionals, and anyone with a connection to the wellbeing of our young people.

Many of us, after witnessing years of testimony debating the humanity of LGBTQIA+ Ohioans, are well aware of the statistics around LGBTQIA+ youth and adverse mental health outcomes. I'm here to attest to the known **fact that it is discrimination and mistreatment of LGBTQIA+ young people that leads to higher risk of attempts at suicide, not an inherent pathology nor inclination toward suicidal ideation.**² I directly treat the depression, anxiety, and traumatic stress that results from proposed legislation such as this. It is difficult to refer to the legislation as a bill, as it is clearly and simply a state sanctioned attack on young people who just want to attend school knowing they will be treated like the rest of their peers.

The negligent nature of this legislation is a clear display of an inflammatory performance of willful hatred, fear mongering, and propaganda-like coercive contempt for some of our most vulnerable Ohioans. **This negligence is evidenced by the vast dismissal of factual and statistical truths, among those being that students who feel safe and supported at school have better educational outcomes.**¹ Perhaps the barrier here is not a lack of understanding the excessive facts and research, moreover a lack of understanding what it is to be LGBTQIA+.

If there is any one point I wish for you all to take with you today it is this; **one's ability to understand or comprehend the experience of another is NOT a prerequisite for the recognition of human dignity, nor the provision of compassion and kindness.** In other words, our ability to affirm and extend empathy to those unlike us has nothing to do with our understanding of their experience. I invite you to take your efforts of understanding what you cannot and instead channel that towards recognizing the common humanity in us all. It is entirely reasonable to not understand an experience so different from your own, it is however, unforgivable to actively choose to discriminate against those most vulnerable. **Let us not forget who we are talking about; REAL young people with REAL experiences and identities, of which have been weaponized against them for political clout and personal gain.**

In my work serving young LGBTQIA+ people in a clinical setting, I can say with certainty that the **discrimination our young people already face in schools due to their identities is the most salient presenting concern I hear**, a close second to the hostility and dismissal they face in their own homes. I've worked with countless young people, parents, and families in building safe, healing, and healthy relationships; adaptive outcomes all share one common element, support systems (specifically adults) that affirm a young person's identity with compassion, love, and open mindedness. **The outcomes of my work are congruent with those echoed in these fact-based discussions; young people who are affirmed in their LGBTQIA+ identities are less likely to miss school, less likely to face victimization, more likely to feel a sense of belonging, and more likely to experience an overall reduction in mental health related symptoms.**¹

Finally, we must acknowledge the dissonance within this bill as it is fundamentally incongruent with Title IX protections and the rights of families in Ohio. Healthcare decisions Ohioans make for themselves and their families are best made in the context of a provider-patient relationship, not within a legislative body. To create legislation that strips parents and families of their basic rights, bodily autonomy, and access to healthcare is an egregious misuse of power that only serves to harm Ohioans.

In an effort to best support Ohio's young people, parents, and families congruent with professional and ethical standards of the Social Work field, **I will continue to provide Gender Affirming Care, synonymous with Live Saving Care.**³ **I urge the committee to protect and honor the lives of all Ohioans by voting no on HB 68.**

Sincerely,

[S. Lee Tepper, MSW, LISW-S](#)