



Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Senators Lang and McColley:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong opposition to House Bill 68 today. My name is Heidi Weaver-Smith, and I am the founder and current Board Secretary of LOVEboldly, an Ohio faith-based nonprofit working to create and develop spaces where LGBTQIA+ people can flourish in Christianity. I myself am a Christian and was raised in the church, and it is on the basis of my faith that I strongly oppose HB68, which I believe causes real harm and damage to children made in the image of God.

As a heterosexual, cisgender individual, I believe the best I can do in this moment is to elevate the voices of those who are most affected by this legislation. For that reason, I would like to read for you a statement drafted anonymously by one of LOVEboldly's constituents, the loving and devoted mother of a trans child, who has asked me to share her words anonymously due to her safety concerns for her child. I want you to understand that this legislation is the reason a mother is fearing for her child's safety today.

Her words read:

I am the mother of 4 brilliant, bright, healthy, successful children, ages 18, 15, 14, and 12. I choose to remain anonymous due to the vitriol and threat of violence that would exist toward our family if our identity was revealed. That makes me incredibly sad, and I hope you find the care and empathy to feel sad about that too. The youngest of our 4 children happens to be transgender. This doesn't define all of who she is, in fact most days the thought that she is trans doesn't cross our minds. She is a straight A middle school student who loves running, baking, soccer and art, especially painting and origami. She is surrounded by a gaggle of friends who know, love, and support her. She is kind, grounded, and wise beyond her years. She has been living as her whole, true self since 1st grade. She has filled our lives, our community, and this world with love and joy. Unfortunately, the only people, the only thing, posing a threat of harm in her life are the people sitting here in this room, the people working tirelessly to pass legislation that would rob my child of the right to the health and happiness she now freely embraces.

I ask HOW?! HOW have some of you chosen to believe you are protecting children when the passing of this legislation would destroy the lives of families like mine? The passing of HB68 would be devastating to our daughter, stripping her of healthcare she desperately needs to remain the healthy, happy, grounded person she is. Stripping her of the joys to play school sports, when OHSAA already has successful and strict regulations in place for trans youth that have proven to work great in the State of Ohio. You're actively in the business of creating legislation that would pose direct harm to youth in our State, causing emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical harm. We know this from the clearest, most reliable data. We know this because we are the family living this reality. Your attempts to pass HB68 are not protecting some of the most vulnerable children among us, instead even the debate around this is causing harm. We have chosen to not tell our 12 yr old daughter about what you're trying to do because it would cause immediate and unbearable stress and harm; it would crush her beautiful spirit.

Creating and developing spaces for LGBTQIA+ people to flourish in Christianity.

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If HB68 passes, it would tear apart our family. Either some of us, or all of us, would have to move, ripping my children from their thriving, established communities and schools. Imagine me and my daughter having to flee this State, leaving behind my husband and sons, so that she can receive the healthcare she needs. I'm appalled that you'd even consider creating a legacy of tearing healthy families apart. Of tearing communities apart. My husband and I are active with public school sports, are PTA board members, and active volunteers and members of our community and school system. The passing of HB68 would push people and families rooted in their communities out of this State.

As a person of faith, a follower of Jesus like so many of you, I implore you to open your hearts and minds to love like Jesus, to hear our very real stories and choose to care for and protect my transgender daughter, our entire family, and so many others living the same reality and facing the terror of losing healthcare, families being separated, and losing homes and communities. I implore you to choose LOVE over fear. To choose SENSIBILITY and SCIENCE over fear. I want to stay in Ohio. I want my children to continue to thrive in their schools and communities. I want to stay together as a family and continue to worship, play, serve, and work right here in Central Ohio. I want to continue watching my daughter grow in health and joyfulness, in faith and inner strength, just like any other parent. Please don't strip us of the life we are living and cultivating as a family. I am praying that you'd choose courage and truth and love, even when you may not fully understand the lives and experiences of others. Please let my daughter continue to live and embrace her life to the fullest. She makes our family, our community, this state and this world a better and more beautiful place in hundreds of ways.

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