

Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to HB68.

My name is Minna Zelch, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm the parent of a transgender child. I could read you statistics and tell you about every major medical association that defines gender affirming care as a best practice, but instead, with her permission, I'm going to tell you our daughter's story. It is the story of a child who was practically born talking. A child who at 12 months knew over 100 words. Who at 8 started her own business giving educational shows about her reptiles to 200+ people. This child was proud of her voice and she knew how to use it.

In 4th grade our daughter discovered that she loved to sing and perform. Music theater became an essential part of her life. Singing is what brought her joy, until the day it suddenly didn't. When our daughter's voice started changing at age fifteen her entire world came crashing down. She went from a confident, outgoing child to a depressed, anxiety riddled kid.

She dropped out of choir, quit her reptile business, gave up her beloved theater, and refused to sing, and often even speak, because her voice did not match who she was inside. When she had to pick a world language for high school she chose American Sign Language so she wouldn't have to talk. She lost her purpose, her passion, her friends, and her sense of self-worth. It was like a switch was flipped and her light just went out.

Being a parent is hard. Being the parent of a transgender child is even harder. We go through the same things as every parent but life is just much more complicated. All parents worry about their kids and wonder if they're making the right choices for them. When your child has any special circumstance that worry is tenfold.

I can understand that all of you have concerns and questions about gender affirming care. I can tell you that every parent of a transgender child has had those same concerns. The difference is for you those concerns are hypothetical, for us they've been part of our daily lives for the past six years. We haven't have the luxury of thinking hypothetically. We've have to make the sometimes excruciatingly difficult choices that we think are right for our child.

Today, we are certain our family made the right choice. Our daughter knows she is a girl the same way our son knows he is left-handed. No one made them this way. No one put the ideas in their heads. It is just how they were born. It wasn't that long ago that we told left-handed children that they were wrong, sometimes even going to the extreme of tying their left hands behind their backs. This didn't make lefties become righties, it made them miserable lefties. You can't make transgender people not be trans. You can either make them miserable or affirm who they are and help guide them to make the best possible choices.

And one of the most affirming activities our child has experienced has been playing softball. She waited three years before she qualified to play under the OHSAA rules during her sophomore year. This makes her one of only 21 transgender girls who have been approved to play a female sport in grades 7-12 in the last eight years. Approximately 175,000-200,000 girls play a sport every single year. All three years our daughter played we had to turn over blood tests showing

her estrogen and testosterone levels, a list of all the medications she takes along with how long she has been taking them, and her height and weight growth charts.

Now that our daughter is in college in another state, I can tell you the NCAA rules are even more arduous as she has to submit similar information multiple times a season. And yet it is worth it. Playing softball has been one of her favorite parts of college. She's years behind in skill and may never play an actual game but her teammates are her best friends and she says she's never met a more supportive group of girls. And yes, they all know she is transgender.

Our child is well aware that she is extraordinarily lucky because she was able to escape Ohio. She even won a \$10,000 Vax-2-School scholarship to any school in this state but she would rather go into debt than stay here because Ohio is no longer a safe place for her. Thanks to all the anti-LGBTQ legislation introduced here, which she spent her entire high school career fighting, she never wants to come back. Like so many others, she had become one of many casualties in your culture war. How many more young people and families are you willing to sacrifice to score a few political points?

Our daughter's story is far from over but thanks in part to affirming medical care and inclusive sports experiences it is becoming a happier one. Her light is starting to flicker again. She is finally getting her confidence back. Instead of thoughts taken over by hatred and self-loathing she is daring to believe in herself again. This was evident two years ago at Christmas when she sang *Silent Night* as a solo at our church. It was the first time she sang in public in four long, heartbreaking years.

This is the power of affirming a transgender child. Affirming health care has helped our daughter find her voice. It has brought her back to us. And, more importantly, it has brought her back to herself. I don't want to think about our daughter enduring an additional three years of agony if we had been forced to wait until she turned eighteen before we could access that care.

How is it that my husband and I are qualified to make other decisions for our children, such as if they should wear masks during a global pandemic, what curriculum they can be exposed to and books they should be allowed read, and if they should be vaccinated, but we're not qualified to decide if and when they should receive gender affirming care?

The truly crazy part is, if this law passes it will be perfectly legal for us to make gender care decisions for our cisgender son. If he had precocious puberty we could put him on puberty blockers. If he suffered from gynecomastia he could have a mastectomy. If our daughter had been identified as a girl at birth she would be completely free to have breast augmentation or implants if she wanted. Every single medical procedure and intervention mentioned in this bill remains perfectly legal for cisgender kids.

All of us here are not asking you to agree with the choices we've made or even understand them. But we are asking you to trust that we know our children better than you do. We also ask you to think about what you would do if your own child was an agony and you knew there were

options, supported by every major medical organization, that might help relieve that agony. Wouldn't you at least want to know what those option are?

All kids and their families deserve the basic right of deciding what medical care they receive. All parents of transgender kids deserve the right to receive information on every care option so they can weigh the risks and benefits and chose what is best for their unique child, just like they would for any other situation.

Please vote no on this harmful legislation.

OHSAA TRANSGENDER RULINGS 2015-2023

SCHOOL YEAR	FTM - HS		FTM- 7-8th		MTF - HS		MTF - 7-8th		Total Rulings
	Approvals	Denials	Approvals	Denials	Approvals	Denials	Approvals	Denials	
2015-16	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
2016-17	5	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	6
2017-18	5	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	9
2018-19	6	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	9
2019-20	5	0	1	0	1	0	3	0	10
2020-21	2	0	2	0	2	1	3	0	10
2021-22**	3	0	0	0	1	0	5	0	9
2022-23	1	0	0	0	6	0	1	0	8
2023-24	1	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	8
TOTAL RULINGS:	32	0	8	0	17	1	14	1	73

As of 11/27/23

- Between 350,000-400,000 student athletes participate in OHSAA sports (grades 7-12) on an annual basis
 - Each transgender student is only approved on a seasonal or annual basis. Therefore, multiple rulings could be given for the same student.
 - Though there have been 31 transgender females approvals, there have only been 21 transgender females athletes who have participated.
- **2021-22 Updated policy to clarify when rulings are needed (reduced transgender male rulings)