

Nick Zingarelli Testimony Against HB 68

My name is Nick Zingarelli and I am offering my testimony in opposition to House Bill 68.

If I am being honest with myself, I always knew this day would come. I have been a participant in the political process that surrounds the issue of transgender rights ever since my daughter came out as transgender three years ago. At the time, we were living in St. Louis, Missouri. I had been a lifelong Ohioan until 2019. My wife is originally from St. Louis and always desired to go home to where her large family lives. Four years ago, we moved to Missouri. After our daughter came out, we met other parents of transgender children. They educated us on the fight that becomes a part of your DNA to ensure that your child can be their true selves. My wife and I traveled to Missouri's capital city of Jefferson City multiple times in 2021 and 2022 to testify against bills just like the one before this committee.

During Missouri's annual legislative session, we worried constantly about whether today would be the day that some kind of unfair and exclusionary legislation would be passed. Our worst fears came true when Missouri enacted a law that effectively eliminated access to gender affirming care for those under 18. Washington University at St. Louis and University of Missouri Health Care stopped providing gender affirming healthcare on the day that this bill went into effect. The law created "an unacceptable level of liability" for the universities and

providers. We left St. Louis, choosing to move back home to Cincinnati in the spring of 2022.

Less than six months after returning to Ohio, I was in front of a House committee arguing against House Bill 454. This was familiar territory for me since I had done it so often in Missouri. My family and our friends within this community received a reprieve when the hearing ended without the bill going to a vote. Sadly, House Bill 68 took its place shortly after this legislative session began. It looks almost identical to the bill that I argued against both in Missouri and during Ohio's last legislative session. The bills even have the same name: the "Save Adolescents From Experimentation" Act. It's an acronym that spells "Safe." The irony and hypocrisy that lies within the name of this bill is nauseating.

This is a bill that does exactly the opposite of what it promises to do. It makes my child unsafe. Today, my child can receive essential gender affirming healthcare through an award-winning clinic that is devoted to the treatment of transgender youth. This clinic's work is based in science and employs some of the best medical professionals in the world. This bill would eliminate this healthcare in this state. Take a moment to process this for yourself: this Senate committee is on the cusp of creating a law that eliminates healthcare for children from a marginalized community that are presently receiving the best healthcare in the world. You have the audacity to entitle this bill "SAFE"?

Before I wrote this testimony, my wife, daughter and I all worked together to decorate our home in celebration of Christmas. As we placed our Nativity scene, we talked to our daughter about the principal message of Jesus: to love others, and to treat everyone as you would want to be treated. There are many that have come before this committee arguing that they are somehow doing God's work by passing this law. Everyone is entitled to their personal beliefs. That's one of the great things about this nation. However, I cannot imagine a God that I pray to taking joy in passing laws that take away children's medical care.

The people that will cast their votes for or against this bill may already have their minds made up. I have asked myself why I would subject myself to a hearing where I will listen to people say horrendous things about my child and her friends when the outcome is probably already known. On some level, I am hoping for a miracle. In the spirit of Christmas, I want the Grinch's heart to grow as he listens to the townspeople sing. I want to see Ebenezer Scrooge turn from miser into hero after being visited by the three ghosts. I hope that the people that have the power to stop these laws will have the courage to vote no or, at a minimum, to not call this bill for a vote. I know this basically calls for a miracle.

Even knowing it is unlikely for a miracle to happen, I write these words and hope to have the chance to speak these words as a form of protest. Do not think for one minute that if this bill becomes law that we will stop fighting.

For those that vote against this bill, please know that we will remember you. We will remember your courage and your willingness to use your power in protection of the marginalized. We will support you as you have supported us.

For those that vote for this bill, please know that we will remember you. We will remember how you have worked to make our lives harder through your service as elected officials. We will fight against you as you have fought against us and we will work to ensure that you have won your last elections as representatives of Ohioans. Because you do not stand for Ohio. Ohio stands for freedom. Ohio stands for the rights of people to make their own decisions as to the medical care they obtain. Ohio has made their voices heard in stating that its citizens should decide for themselves what is medically best for each individual Ohioan. Elected representatives are to enact the will of their constituents, not their own will or the will of well-funded powerful special interests.

Please do your job and vote no against this bill. Otherwise, we will see you in November.