

Opponent testimony for HB454
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To Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 454.

My name is Derek Burtch and I am here in my capacity as a teacher, a parent, and co-creator of the educational nonprofit Erase the Space. Of these three identities, I have held the title of teacher the longest. I have just finished my 14th year teaching in the state of Ohio having spent 6 years at North Union High School in Richwood, 7 years at Olentangy Liberty High School in Powell, and am currently teaching at Olentangy High School in Lewis Center. My son just turned two and a half, so I am still very much learning what it means to be a parent.

From the start of the new text in this legislation, it is unclear what the purpose of this bill is. While trying, I am assuming, to make a point about the minimal percentage of Americans impacted by gender dysphoria, the bill states that a “tiny percentage” of the population deals with this issue. And that is what this bill seems to prey upon for political clout in a culture war, the tiny or small. Those that are already a vulnerable population in school will have their right to choose who they are taken away; and their teachers will find themselves violating the safe space to be themselves as mandatory reporters.

The bill cites “studies,” but fails to claim where the information is coming from. The bill cites regrets of teens using puberty blocking drugs and that suicide rates go up after gender reassignment surgeries are performed. It is still not clear, a theme in this bill, where this information comes from. I do know a few pieces of information that directly contradicts these claims. The Trevor Project surveyed over 35,000 LGBTQ youth throughout the country and found that “42% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth.” In addition to this staggering statistic, which I have seen in-person and heard from the mouths of transgender students, the study also found, unsurprisingly, that “Transgender and nonbinary youth who reported having pronouns respected by all of the people they lived with attempted suicide at half the rate of those who did not have their pronouns respected by anyone with whom they lived.”

So I am left wondering, who is this bill protecting? A bill that spends five pages defining surgeries and terms that don't apply to the target population because this bill targets LGBTQ youth and gender reassignment surgery is limited to people 18 and older. The claims of irreversible consequences don't add up then if surgery is out because the effects of puberty-blocking drugs is reversible, according to the Mayo Clinic, among other accredited medical entities. If this is the case, is there more damage done by this bill to the mental health of trans youth who find themselves at the receiving end of culture war rage? If this population is so tiny and there are no real health risks to the medical care in question, why spend so much time

and energy introducing this bill or testifying in support of it, all the while according to the vice chair of the psychology and behavioral health department for Chicago Children's Hospital, "These are kids who are already quite vulnerable. We know that suicide rates among transgender youth are incredibly high. We would anticipate that legislative efforts that are created to reduce access to lifesaving care are going to have negative consequences."

For many LGBTQ youth, their only haven from an unwelcoming homelife or peer situations are teachers. Adults who care about their well-being and accept them for who they are. I have spoken with students as they go through depressive episodes, addressed them when risky behavior was posted online and brought to my attention, and just been present for them to vent and figure things out. Sadly, that refuge, along with their healthcare, would be taken from them with this bill. So, who is actually protected with this bill?