

The Ohio Counseling Association (OCA) Strongly Opposes Ohio House Bill 454

On October 19, 2021, Reps. Gary Click (R) and Diane V. Grendell (R) of the Ohio House of Representatives introduced House Bill 454 (HB 454), or the “Save Adolescents from Experimentation (SAFE) Act.” On October 26, 2021, HB 454 was referred to the House Families Aging, and Human Services Committee. On February 17, 2022, the committee held its first proponent testimony hearing on HB 454. The committee has scheduled a second round of proponent testimony on HB 454 to occur this Thursday, May 19, 2022.

HB 454, egregiously referred to as the “SAFE Act”, would prohibit medical procedures which seek to affirm a minor’s gender identity and expression regardless of parental consent, including gender affirmation surgery, as well as the prescription of puberty blockers and gender affirming hormone therapy.

HB 454 would also force school staff, administrators, and counselors to disclose a student’s gender identity and expression to their parents.

Further, HB 454 would prohibit insurance, both public and private, from providing funds to cover medicalized gender affirming treatment for adolescents.

The legislation, if enacted, would threaten to withdraw public funds from any medical facility where such procedures occur, in addition to removing a physician or other healthcare provider’s license (*including counselors*) by defining such treatments as “unprofessional conduct” to such an extent that making an “actual or threatened violation” of the legislation is reasonable grounds for a lawsuit.

Gender affirming medical care is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Endocrine Society, and the American Academy of Family Physicians, and is viewed by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), and the Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities (SAIGE; formerly ALGBTIC) as evidence-based care.

Transgender and gender expansive youth are two to three times more likely to experience depression and anxiety disorders as compared to their cisgender peers, and attempt suicide at inordinately higher rates. Studies show that gender-affirming hormone therapy, including the prescription of puberty blockers, is associated with improvements in anxiety, depression, and overall quality of life in both adolescence and adulthood. Following medicalized gender affirming treatment, the psychological functioning of transgender and gender expansive adolescents is elevated to a comparable or higher level than their cisgender peers.

Schools and their staff, including school counselors, faculty, and administrators, have served as safe spaces for transgender and gender expansive youth to explore their identities and freely express themselves. According to data obtained from the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), only one in four lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender expansive, queer, intersex, asexual, and/or pan/polysexual (LGBTGEQIAP+) youth “definitely” feel like they can be themselves as an LGBTGEQIAP+ person at home. HB 454 would result in the elimination of schools as a safe space for LGBTGEQIAP+ youth and could further create an unstable home life.

HB 454 is a blatant attack on the human rights and well-being of transgender and gender expansive youth. Following the introduction of similar legislation against trans youth in the state of Texas (i.e., HB 25), the Trevor Project has reported a 150% increase in crisis contacts between January 1, 2021, through August 30, 2021.

Legislative attempts to regulate the access to medical care for transgender and gender expansive youth only serve to perpetuate institutional oppression and eradicate the rights of transgender youth to make an informed decision about their health in collaboration with their families and their healthcare providers. Therefore, OCA strongly opposes HB 454.

OCA's Call to Action on HB 454

Please contact your state legislators to encourage them to **OPPOSE** HB 454. You may do so by either:

- Visiting Equality Ohio's Linktree at <https://linktr.ee/equalityohio>.
- Visiting The Ohio Legislature website at <https://legislature.ohio.gov/> and, under 'Who Represents Me?', enter your address to find your state legislators and their contact information.

Please feel encouraged to mention that you are reaching out as a member of the Ohio Counseling Association in your personalized email or voicemail message.

*Resources mentioned within the statement may be found under the 'Resources' tab at <https://ohiocounseling.org/>.