

Submitter: Eliot Swimmer

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2458

I vehemently oppose HB 2458. I write as a parent and as a Democrat of over 40 years who is now politically homeless because my party has embraced an ideology that pushes a dangerous, evidence-free medical pathway for children.

At 14 years old, our son, like many children who discover their trans identity during adolescence, already had a long history of mental health issues. Diagnosed with ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder, anxiety, and depression, he also has ASD traits — rigid, black and white thinking, and sensory issues. He has always had a hard time managing interactions with others, frequently getting angry and frustrated if people don't agree with him or if he doesn't get his way. He says he doesn't know his sexuality and doesn't care. He was severely bullied in 7th grade — choked and punched — and called degrading homophobic slurs. His ASD assessment last year, conducted over Zoom, revealed no definitive diagnosis, but a social-emotional functioning age equivalent of 5 to 5-1/2 years old.

Our child announced that he felt more like a girl than a boy in October 2020, during the COVID lockdown and after six months of an almost totally online life. The year prior, he was in an intensive outpatient program for 5 months following a suicide attempt. The therapist, whom he had a good rapport with, noted body dysmorphia and self-hatred, but did not mention gender, and made no referral to the in-house gender clinic. Our son never mentioned gender as an issue.

After his announcement, we immediately affirmed his trans identity. We used his preferred name and pronouns and sought help and information from the gender clinic. They put our son on puberty blockers after a 1-hour zoom call with a social worker, saying blockers were safe and fully reversible, and would give him time to explore his gender identity and calm his distress. Nothing could have been further from the reality we faced.

Within a few weeks, it became apparent to the social worker how unstable our son was and after a handful of sessions, our child refused any further contact with her. Under affirmative care treatment, his mental health steeply declined. Despite evidence that puberty blockers were having an extreme negative effect on our child, the clinic never suggested stopping them, and by the time it became apparent that this medication was harming our child, we were locked in because they had administered a shot that lasted for 6 months — a significant time period for a teenager. The clinic's recommendation for treating our son's increasing instability and aggression was that he start hormones. He was 15. At the end of that 6 months, we

rescinded our consent for any further gender treatment.

Now, after a harrowing year since we stopped puberty blockers, my son is doing better, no longer ranting about gender, although likely still quietly grappling with gender issues. Imagine how different our path would have been if he'd been able to get quality mental health care before being fast-tracked to medicalization — care that approached his distress thoughtfully and openly, as would be the case in any other circumstance when any child has a sudden and extreme change in identity, let alone one with a history of mental illness and disability. Did the bullying contribute to our son's gender distress? Did something worse happen at the school? Is our son's distress related to the difficulties of going through puberty, or discomfort about his sexuality, or tied to possibly being on the autism spectrum. Our son couldn't get help working through what his newfound gender identity was about because in my state, therapists are not allowed to do anything but affirm. This is no way to treat young people. This is a way to ensure that they give no deeper thought to their motivations, gain no insight into their distress, and lock onto hormones and surgery as the only answer to their discomfort. Affirmation only is harming young people. Passing HB 2458 will ensure this.