

Ed, here is the testimony that I have written. I know you have a lot to cover, I ask that this be posted anonymously. I fear like many, speaking up would jeopardize my personal life.

To the honorable legislators,

As I write this testimony my heart breaks as I relive these moments as a parent. I think to myself what if my wife and I ignored everything we knew of our child and trusted what the school counselor told us? I can assure you it would have had a tragic ending. Being a parent we know our children from the day they are born and watch them grow and learn. From the moment you find out you are going to be a parent the bond between you has started. When you first get to hold them and see their face the first time. When your eyes connect and they see you and recognize you. Hearing their first words to see them take those first steps, we watch with wonder as they discover the world around them. You see them gravitate to clothing, friends, sports, etc. All of those moments are imprinted in your mind. When things in the blink change, you recognize it.

Everyday as parents we capture snapshots in our minds of those special moments that remind us of when we were kids. First time we scraped your knee, rode a bike, first days of school and empathized with your kids because you know how hard those first days are. Everyday there is something special that we capture with our kids. We imagine, naively, that our kids will experience school the same as we did. Making and losing friends. Having a favorite teacher and of course the one that we didn't like so much, usually because they pushed us to be better, to expect more from ourselves and hold ourselves accountable. There is a movement that seems to be trying to say all of those experiences and history we have as parents with our kids are false or invalid. That we as parents do not really know our kids.

Teachers, counselors, etc., who do not have the history or awareness of family dynamics. Certainly not when class sizes and caseloads are so large that they cannot afford to spend 1 minute a day for a single student.(this is based on my child's class size and the number of classes her teachers had per day. If they spent 1 minute of one of one time per day per student in each class they would have had 10 minutes to teach the days lesson). They cannot come close to having the knowledge and awareness of a parent. It is incredibly important for counselors, doctors and to a degree teachers to be able to have full conversations with kids. Not limited by an arbitrary line in the sand. "I cant ask that or it will be conversion talk" or "I think this, but I don't want to risk being told I am using conversion therapy". Limits that are placed on teachers, counselors and medical professionals, are causing the professionals who have trained to support others. It is like telling a builder that they can build the house, but they can only use a hand screwdriver. We are asking teachers to expand beyond their area of expertise and be medical professionals and medical professionals have been relegated to being able to hear, but not listen or ask what is truly troubling the a patient.

Today a teacher hears a child say "I want to be called X with new pronouns". Without any deeper conversation, its just ok, rubberstamp and move on and dont include the parents. In what other situation would we allow any child to self-diagnose and have those entrusted to support them, just nod and say ok and not get parents involved?

In my case, if someone had just taken some time to talk to my child and really understand what was going on, they would have learned that she was having a really hard time coming into school after Covid. Its really hard trying to find friends when you get into Middle school. When you go through puberty it adds anxiety and being self-conscious about ones body. they would have also found out that she was

really worried about her brother who has special needs. Nothing was asked, it was just smile and move on. If teachers, counselors and professionals were allowed to ask questions and actually have honest and probing conversations, we would have a much more robust and well rounded support system for our kids.

When I sat and talked with my daughter one on one. I did what I would expect any counselor to do, but I was starting from a point of having complete life history. Things that a 30 minutes conversation would not teach about my child. I discovered several things that were bothering her and that she was struggling with. She was really scared going back to school after covid and was scared to take her mask off. She was having tremendous anxiety from having to make friends as she had not seen anyone for nearly 2 years. She was entering middle school with classes size of 30-35 kids and if she didn't make it to class early, she was sitting on the floor because there were not enough desks. She was scared to ask questions because peers may laugh. The most common statements she would make when we would talk together was "I just want to be one of the cool kids." "When they asked for names, it seemed like everyone was using different names, so I thought I needed to. I didn't want to left out." I talked to her about my struggles with weight, being made fun of and experiencing the same or similar issues when I went to middle school. Feeling like I could not find a good friend group. All the things she was trying to do, were in an effort to make friends and be one of the "cool kids".

When we discovered things were not going well, we contacted the school. I implore you to consider the following quote from the counselor that we engaged with who had only met my daughter for 30 minutes and without any understanding of who we are, what our relationship is with our daughter or a shred of a reason to think our home was safe or not, told my wife "If you don't support your child, she will commit suicide. You are being abusive and could lose your child." She further went on to say "No child ever changes their mind, once they make a decision, they are 100%!". I will tell you that both of those statements are patently false. Kids are highly susceptible to peer influence and what is trending. If you arent on Discord, TikTok, Facebook or other apps, you are not cool. If she had even done some basic investigation she would have seen that my child was only using a name and pronoun change in 2 of her classes and only in classes that she had with a specific set of friends. This counselor was ready to withhold information, call CPS and setup what I would say is conversion therapy in a different sense because she was unwilling to perform the due diligence to fully support a child. How many other kids were shuffled through the system because of the limits placed on conversations? How many have been medically harmed that may have been just like my daughter struggling to find friends and pushed by lazy or restricted support systems? I firmly believe at minimum, the counsel did more harm than good.

Our daughter, two years later is thriving. She is happy, healthy and doing very well in school. The child that was full of anxiety, self-doubt, struggling with puberty and incredibly shy. The girl who was uncomfortable in her body and did what she could to avoid spotlight, ran for class president. She was nominated for National Junior Future leadership Council in DC. She plays basketball and looking forward to high school. She is aspiring to get scholarships so she can go to college.

At the start of this, if the teachers and counselor had included my wife and I into the conversation, then been allowed to have a medical professional work with our daughter to have a full conversation about depression, adolescents, friends, puberty, etc., I firmly believe we would have been able to support our daughter even better. If someone externally had been able to do something other than fearmonger and the audacity to think they knew in 30 minutes, more than her parents who had 12 years of experience

with her, we would have been able to help our child sooner. How many kids have been short-changed on counseling because the counselor or therapists hands were tied? Shouldn't we all want the most robust support for our society? Shouldn't we want to have the ability to go beyond the surface? Whats more, why are teachers being burdened with being educators as well as in my view practicing medicine without medical licensing? When it comes to kids, parents, teachers and counselors need to work together. We need to be allowing full conversations that are conducted by experts. Teachers should refer students to a trained medical professional and parents need to be 100% involved from the start. Currently, parents are treated as the enemy and abusers without any evidence to support that view. Anytime there is mental distress, it would be a minimum expectation that all parties involved in a childs life be brought to the table and we should be able to have full, open and honest conversations.

So I will close with this. What if my wife and I had just ignored the knowledge, history and understanding we had of our daughter? What if we just ignored the signs we had seen at home, that our daughter was clearly having depression. She was removing herself from our family conversations. Acting in a way that atypical for her prior to that start of that school year. That is was clear she was hiding or embarrassed of something. What if we had not had conversations with her and shared our personal struggles of fitting in when we were growing up? I fear that my daughter would, like so many other teens over the last 5-6 years, became a statistic that has risen to epidemic proportions. Not because its organic, but because the adults who are suppose to support and help our kids are unable to ask questions. Instead they are required to give kids the keys to the pharmacy and rubber stamp self-diagnosed issues for the benefit of being able to hit the easy button.

I ask you to please consider this testimony and understand that not every kid is the same and support should be unique to that child. Every parent is not a danger or a threat. Their biography will be written by each of you. Will it be that you go to sleep knowing you have setup rules that have bias toward only one method of support or will be that you recognize the need and requirement that every child is treated effectively and fully, with no limitations on what conversations can be had with them?

Thank you for your consideration,

Gresham Oregon Parent