



Ohio State Board of Education Public Testimony

September 20, 2022

President Charlotte McGuire, Vice President Martha Manchester, and other State Board of Education members:

My name is Dr. Rhea Debussy, and my pronouns are she/her. I'm the Director of External Affairs for Equitas Health. As you're likely aware, Equitas Health is a federally designated community health center and one of the largest LGBTQ+ and HIV/AIDS serving healthcare organizations in the country. Each year, we serve tens of thousands of patients in Ohio, Texas, Kentucky, and West Virginia, and since 1984, we have been working to advance "care for all."¹ I'm thankful for the opportunity to address you all today, and I'm here to provide testimony in opposition to the proposed and so-called "Resolution to Support Parents, Schools, and Districts in Rejecting Harmful, Coercive, and Burdensome Gender Identity Policies."

On June 15, 2022, we joined the National Women's Law Center and more than 200 other organizations in calling for the Biden administration and the U.S. Dept. of Education to undo the Trump-era Title IX regulations, which were put in place under former U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos.² We joined this coalition of more than 200 organizations – including other Ohio-based organizations like the Ace and Aro Alliance of Central Ohio, Equality Ohio, LGBTQ+ Allies of Lake County, TransOhio, and others – because the roll-back of Obama-era protections has put LGBTQ+ youth at risk.³ More specifically, the unconstitutional Trump-era regulations, which we called on the Biden administration to replace, were particularly dangerous for the well-being of transgender, non-binary, and gender expansive youth.⁴

The unconstitutional Trump-era regulations removed existing protections for gender expansive youth, and the proposed resolution under consideration by the Ohio State Board of Education seeks to defend those regulations as sound policy. However, data from numerous sources demonstrates the flawed logic of defending said policy, rather than supporting the needs of LGBTQ+ and especially gender expansive youth. For instance, 2019 research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* indicates that nearly 2% of students identify as transgender. Furthermore, this research also indicates the number of challenges that these students face in educational settings. Ultimately, nearly 35% attempt suicide, and transgender and non-binary students, who are in less inclusive educational environments, are more likely to have engaged in self-harming behaviors and/or suicide attempts. As such, this data shows that validating our

¹ <https://equitashealth.com/about-us/>

² <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Title-IX-NPRM-Letter-President-Biden-Jun-15-2022.pdf>

³ <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201605-title-ix-transgender.pdf>

⁴ <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201702-title-ix.pdf>;
https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/proposed-title-ix-regulation-fact-sheet.pdf?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=

students' diverse gender identities creates a net positive that actually reduces negative mental health outcomes.⁵

Similarly, long-standing data from GLSEN—a national organization that focuses on LGBTQ+ inclusion in K through 12 settings—shows similar results. Transgender and non-binary students, who are in more supportive educational environments, report lower rates of mental health concerns (i.e. depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, etc.). Additionally, transgender and non-binary students, who are in more supportive educational environments, also report higher rates of student success, including the following: higher GPAs, higher educational aspirations, higher levels of student engagement in co-curricular activities, and more. Regarding these points, the converse is true of transgender and non-binary students in less supportive educational environments that do not validate and celebrate their gender identities.⁶

Complementing the high school focused data from GLSEN, The Trevor Project's most recent annual survey, which focuses on LGBTQ+ high school and 'traditional' college-aged populations, indicates similar trends. Overall, 42% of respondents seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, and more than half of that subpopulation was comprised of transgender and non-binary youth and young adults. From an intersectional perspective, the attempted suicide rates for LGBTQ+ youth and young adults was statistically higher for respondents of color. Indigenous respondents reported rates at nearly 3 times that of their white counterparts, and Black respondents reported rates at nearly 2 times that of their white counterparts.⁷ Dr. Teagan Vaughn (she/her), who is the Director of Gender Affirming Care at Equitas Health, notes that:

“Reported data also very likely underrepresent these students and their inequities as a result of survivorship bias, and we overlook students and young people who are no longer with us. The removal of these protections is the removal of care, and purposefully withdrawing care for a subset of the population is wrong and unethical.”⁸

On September 12, 2022, Equitas Health, once again, joined the National Women's Law Center and nearly 200 other organizations in providing public comment to the U.S. Dept. of Education, and the purpose was to help inform their newly proposed Title IX regulations.⁹ We have actually urged them to create even stronger protections for LGBTQ+ students, pregnant students, students with disabilities, and survivors of sexual violence. With that in mind, we firmly oppose the proposed resolution currently under consideration by the State Board of Education here today.

Respectfully submitted,

Rhea Debussy, Ph.D. (she/her)
Director of External Affairs, Equitas Health
1105 Schrock Road, Suite 400, Columbus, OH 43229

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6803a3.htm>

⁶ https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/NSCS19-FullReport-032421-Web_0.pdf

⁷ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/?section=Introduction>

⁸ Quotation provided on September 17, 2022.

⁹ <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/NWLC-Title-IX-sign-on-comment-9.12.22-vF2-189.pdf>