



Ohio State Board of Education Public Testimony

November 15, 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 as you likely recall, I joined you both in September² and October³ 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." Yet again, I'm here to do the same.

During the past two months, I shared that our agency 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.⁴ As mentioned at these meetings, 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.⁵

And as you likely recall, these unconstitutional Trump-era regulations, which we called on the Biden administration to replace, were particularly dangerous for the well-being of transgender, non-binary, gender expansive, and intersex youth.⁶ Furthermore, these unconstitutional Trump-era regulations removed existing protections for these students, and the proposed resolution – which was astoundingly and unfortunately still under consideration by the State Board of Education during you all's October 31 and November 14 Executive Committee meetings – seeks to defend those regulations as sound policy.⁷ Despite the proposed changes made in the recently submitted "Toal Amendment," this proposed resolution still fails to meet the threshold of sound, comprehensive, and equitable public policy for the same reasons noted in my previous testimonies to this body.⁸

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

² <http://public.education.ohio.gov/StateBoardBooks/2022%20-%20Board%20Books/September%20-%202022/Public%20Participation/Rhea%20Debussy%20-%20Equitas%20Health%20-%20Testimony.pdf>

³ <http://public.education.ohio.gov/StateBoardBooks/2022%20-%20Board%20Books/October%20-%202022/Public%20Participation/Rhea%20Debussy%20-%20Testimony%20-Equitas%20Health.pdf>

⁴ <https://nwl.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Title-IX-NPRM-Letter-President-Biden-Jun-15-2022.pdf>

⁵ <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201605-title-ix-transgender.pdf>

⁶ <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=

⁷ <http://public.education.ohio.gov/StateBoardBooks/2022%20-%20Board%20Books/October%2031,%202022-Executive%20Committee/October%2031st%20Executive%20Committee%20Agenda.pdf>

⁸ [http://public.education.ohio.gov/StateBoardBooks/2022%20-%20Board%20Books/October%2031,%202022-Executive%20Committee/\(Toal%20Amendment\)%20Resolution%20to%20Support%20Parents%20Schools%20and%20Districts%20in%20Rejecting%20Harmful%20Coercive%20and%20Burdensome%20Gender%20Identity%20Policies%20and%20to%20Protect%20Federal%20Funding%20Subject%20t%20\(003\).pdf](http://public.education.ohio.gov/StateBoardBooks/2022%20-%20Board%20Books/October%2031,%202022-Executive%20Committee/(Toal%20Amendment)%20Resolution%20to%20Support%20Parents%20Schools%20and%20Districts%20in%20Rejecting%20Harmful%20Coercive%20and%20Burdensome%20Gender%20Identity%20Policies%20and%20to%20Protect%20Federal%20Funding%20Subject%20t%20(003).pdf)

During my testimony in September, I shared numerous data points from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),⁹ GLSEN (i.e. a national organization that focuses on LGBTQ+ inclusion in K through 12 settings),¹⁰ and The Trevor Project (i.e. a national organization that focuses on suicide prevention initiatives for LGBTQ+ youth and young adults).¹¹ In October, I shared several additional data points from The Trevor Project, which noted that 1) LGBTQ+ youth with high levels of social support from their family reported suicidality at less than half the rate of those who felt only low or moderate levels of support and 2) LGBTQ+ youth who found their school to be affirming reported lower rates of attempting suicide.¹²

In both September and October, many other individuals and organizations shared similar testimonies, and *most importantly*, testimony was also provided from transgender, non-binary, and gender expansive youth, who would be directly affected by this resolution. Similarly, many individuals also attended you all's recent Executive Committee meetings, where you discussed this resolution without offering the opportunity for public testimony. Even so, members of the public have continued to monitor the actions of this body, given the alarming actions that have occurred here during the past two months. However, this harmful resolution is still under consideration, as even more people from across our state and country wait for you all to unabashedly reject it.

Last month, I shared some insights from my lived experience as a transgender woman, my decade-long career in higher education, and my professional experience as a trained Title IX and Civil Rights Investigator. I hope that this information was useful in reminding you all about why you are here—i.e. to serve our students regardless of their identities. It also bears repeating that inclusion and equity are important to Ohioans, and the Ohio Dept. of Education's strategic plan, "Each Child, Our Future," clearly emphasizes this. This strategic plan for Ohio's schools specifically 1) lists "equity" as one of three core principles, 2) indicates "meet[ing] needs of [the] whole child" as one of ten priority strategies,¹³ and 3) conceptualizes "honoring each student" by emphasizing "equity and [the] specific needs of individual students" as one of five major shifts for the state's educational policy.¹⁴

By failing our transgender, non-binary, gender expansive, and intersex students, this proposed resolution fails to meet the objectives set forth by the Ohio Dept. of Education. In reflecting upon this, Dr. Teagan Vaughn (she/her), who is the Director of Gender Affirming Care at Equitas Health, notes that:

"As with providing healthcare, the provision of education is dependent upon respecting individual identities and personhoods. Only when this respectful relationship exists can learning flourish and our youth benefit."¹⁵

Once again, Equitas Health firmly opposes this proposed resolution, and for the sake of our transgender, non-binary, gender expansive, and intersex youth, we urge all members of the State Board of Education to vote against this dangerous resolution.

Respectfully submitted,

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⁹ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6803a3.htm>

¹⁰ https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/NSCS19-FullReport-032421-Web_0.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/?section=Introduction>

¹² <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/>

¹³ <https://education.ohio.gov/about/eachchildourfuture>

¹⁴ <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/About/EachChildOurFuture/ECOF-Five-Shifts.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>

¹⁵ Quotation provided on November 9, 2022.