



Dear Members of the Executive Committee of Ohio's State Board of Education,

My name is Alison Paxson, and I am a Senior Policy Associate for the [Children's Defense Fund-Ohio \(CDF-Ohio\)](#). Born out of the civil rights movement, our organization has been advocating on behalf of Ohio's children for more than forty years, striving to advance policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse and neglect, and ensure their access to targeted health care, quality education, and nutritional wellness. **In recognition of our shared commitment to the well-being of all Ohio children, I am writing to urge you to reject the [Resolution to Support Parents, Schools, And Districts in Rejecting Harmful, Coercive, and Burdensome Gender Identity Policies](#), and any attempts to amend or revise it.**

Policies that build inclusive educational environments where students feel accepted, valued, and safe benefit all children. As we stated during [public comment](#) in both September and October, the irreparable harm of this resolution is two-fold: its endorsement of discriminatory practices poses severe detriment to an already marginalized student population and it also risks students across Ohio losing access to school meals they rely on every day for food security and proper nutrition.

Our schools should be places of social acceptance and affirmative support for students and their identities. This is integral to promoting their mental health and well-being. In 2020, nearly [one in eight](#) Ohio children received a diagnosis of anxiety, depression or both, up 42% from 2016 – the 10th-highest increase nationwide. We know this rate is much higher today in 2022 and disproportionately higher for our LGBTQ+ children – the very children targeted by this resolution. There is no doubt that passage of this resolution would pose further harm to student mental health. In fact, you have heard that directly from the youth who have testified to that very fact.

Bottom line, consideration of such a resolution in the first place has already harmed countless Ohio students. Including this high school senior who testified in October, stating:

*"Before you say that this resolution is just a suggestion and it won't be hurting anyone, stop and think. Just the fact that this resolution is being considered sends the message that trans and queer kids like me are sub-human, that our rights are fair game to be stripped away. Think about the fact that I am so terrified of this*



*resolution passing that I took time off of school to come testify before you. I don't want to be here, I would much rather be studying with my friends at school."*

I represent an organization committed to honoring the voices of youth and ensuring they are amplified to state leaders. The lived experiences and everyday realities of children and youth in our state must be heard and meaningfully considered in deliberation of policies and resolutions (like this one) that impact their livelihoods.

But the fact is that over the past two months, this board has heard from not just this high school senior but countless other students to whom this board has an ultimate responsibility to protect. These children have missed school to testify against a resolution that denies their very existence. They have gone before an audience of adults, some friendly, some antagonistic, and shared their most agonizing moments, their terror and fears for the safety of themselves and their peers. They've asked for love and acceptance, begged for this board to reject a policy that would make already challenging conditions in their schools worse and bar their classrooms from opportunities to improve these conditions.

If this Executive Committee votes to place this resolution back on the Board's voting agenda for November, thereby inviting continued consideration by the full Board, then this committee will force even more terrified, vulnerable children and families to come to the state capitol to lobby for their own human dignity.

We urge you: do not allow this resolution to consume any more time and resources in place of the many pressing issues facing our schools. **Instead, take up policies that build up and celebrate our students, viewing them as assets to their communities and our state's future.** Rather than continuing to deliberate a policy that would undermine trust between parents, schools, and their communities, we urge you to prioritize policies that help forge strong partnerships between these entities and empower us to wrap students in the supports they need to thrive in a critical moment in time when they need it most.

In Unity for Ohio's children,

Alison Paxson  
Senior Policy Associate  
Children's Defense Fund-Ohio