



## Ohio State Board of Education Public Testimony

December 12, 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."<sup>1</sup> As you likely recall, I joined you all in September<sup>2</sup>, October<sup>3</sup>, and November<sup>4</sup> 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." For the fourth time in four months, I'm here to do the same.

As shared previously, 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.<sup>5</sup> As mentioned at you all's previous 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.<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, these unconstitutional Trump-era regulations removed existing protections for these students, and the proposed resolution – which was astoundingly and unfortunately passed by you all's Executive Committee in November – still seeks to defend those regulations as sound policy.<sup>8</sup> Despite the proposed changes made in the recently approved amendment, this proposed resolution still – unequivocally *and* without question – fails to meet the threshold of sound, comprehensive, and equitable public policy for the same reasons noted in my previous three testimonies to this body.<sup>9</sup>

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup> <https://public.education.ohio.gov/StateBoardBooks/2022%20-%20Board%20Books/November%20-%202022/Public%20Participation/Rhea%20Debussy%20-Testimony%20-Equitas%20Health.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://nwlrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Title-IX-NPRM-Letter-President-Biden-Jun-15-2022.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201605-title-ix-transgender.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <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=](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=)

<sup>8</sup> <http://public.education.ohio.gov/StateBoardBooks/2022%20-%20Board%20Books/October%2031,%202022-Executive%20Committee/October%2031st%20Executive%20Committee%20Agenda.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> [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),<sup>10</sup> GLSEN (i.e. a national organization that focuses on LGBTQ+ inclusion in K through 12 settings),<sup>11</sup> and The Trevor Project (i.e. a national organization that focuses on suicide prevention initiatives for LGBTQ+ youth and young adults).<sup>12</sup> At that meeting, I highlighted how dangerous this proposed resolution is. During my testimony 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.<sup>13</sup> At all of these previous meetings, 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. However, this harmful resolution is still under consideration, as people across the country continue waiting for you all to unabashedly reject it.

At these previous meetings, I also shared 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 had hoped that this information would prove useful in reminding you all about *why* you are here—i.e. to serve our students regardless of their identities. I have also previously reminded you all that inclusion and equity are important to Ohioans, and the Ohio Dept. of Education’s strategic plan, “Each Child, Our Future,” clearly emphasizes this. However, it bears repeating, for a third time, that 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,<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> Despite the major conflict between this resolution and both our youth and the Ohio Dept. of Education’s strategic plan, we are still – four months later – still providing information to demonstrate just how dangerous this resolution is for transgender, non-binary, gender expansive, and intersex youth.

This proposed resolution fails to meet the objectives set forth by the Ohio Dept. of Education, and more alarmingly, it fails our transgender, non-binary, gender expansive, and intersex students, this. For the fourth time in four months, I would like to remind you that Equitas Health firmly opposes this proposed resolution. 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 immediately.

Respectfully submitted,

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6803a3.htm>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/NSCS19-FullReport-032421-Web\\_0.pdf](https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/NSCS19-FullReport-032421-Web_0.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/?section=Introduction>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://education.ohio.gov/about/eachchildourfuture>

<sup>15</sup> <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/About/EachChildOurFuture/ECOF-Five-Shifts.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>