

STATEMENT AS PREPARED
OHIO GOVERNOR MIKE DEWINE
HOUSE BILL 68 PRESS CONFERENCE
DECEMBER 29, 2023
COLUMBUS, OH

Good morning.

On December 18th, the Ohio Legislature sent me House Bill 68 (HB 68). Since that time, I have sought out people on all sides of the issue to hear their concerns.

I listened to the bill sponsor, Representative Gary Click and had a very good conversation with him. I appreciate that he and his colleagues have shined a light on this very important issue.

I listened to physicians and counselors who provide gender-affirming care at five of Ohio's children's hospitals.

I also listened to physicians who advocate for pausing gender-affirming care until more research on the long-term health effects is conducted.

I listened to families and young people who have had negative experiences and individuals who have undergone hormone treatments and then de-transitioned back to their original gender, as well as those who had gender surgeries in other states when they were minors.

I also listened to youth and parents. Parents looked me in the eye and told me that their child is alive today only because of the gender-affirming care that they have received. And, youth who have transitioned to a new gender told me that they are thriving today because of that transition.

It is very important that we all remember that all those on each side of this issue truly and sincerely believe their position best protects children. These are truly complex issues, and reasonable people can draw vastly different conclusions.

This bill would impact a very small number of Ohio children. But, for those children who face gender dysphoria and for their families, the consequences of this bill could not be more profound.

Ultimately, I believe this is about protecting human life. Many parents have told me that their child would be dead today if they had not received the treatment they received from an Ohio children's hospital. I have also been told, by those who are now grown adults, that but for this care, they would have taken their life when they were teenagers.

What so many of these young people and their families have also told me is that nothing they have faced in life could ever prepare them for this extremely tough journey. Parents are making decisions about the most precious thing in their life -- their child -- and none of us should underestimate the gravity and the difficulty of those decisions.

These are gut-wrenching decisions that should be made by parents and should be informed by teams of doctors who are advising them. These are parents who have watched their child suffer, sometimes for years, and who have real concerns that their child may not survive to reach adulthood. While the child's care team informs their decisions, it is the parents who are living with that child who know their child better than anyone else in the world.

These are horribly, horribly difficult situations. These are crisis situations for that child and for that child's family. Families are basing their decisions on the best medical information they can get. The decision to move forward should only be reached if the child, the child's parents, and the medical team all agree that this is the right decision.

Were I to sign House Bill 68 or were House Bill 68 to become law, Ohio would be saying that the State -- that the government -- knows better what is medically best for a child than the two people who love that child the most -- the parents. While there are rare times in the law -- in other circumstances -- where the State overrules the medical decisions made by the parents, I can think of no example where this is done, not only against the decision of the parents, but also against the medical judgement of the treating physician and the treating team of medical experts.

Therefore, I cannot sign this bill as it is currently written, and this morning just a few moments ago, I vetoed the bill.

Representative Click worked very hard on this bill. He studied the issues. He is a good person, who fervently wants to protect children.

I thank the General Assembly for holding many hearings and listening to hours of testimony from all sides. I appreciate their deliberative process.

I have listened to the concerns the Legislature raised that led to this bill. While I have reached a different conclusion on whether to sign this bill, I do share a number of these concerns and agree that action is necessary regarding a number of issues raised.

I believe we can address a number of goals in House Bill 68 by administrative rules that will have a better chance of surviving judicial review and being adopted. Today, I am directing my administration and the relevant agencies to begin work on administrative rules that will go through the full JCARR process to establish important protections. I invite the members of the General Assembly to meet with us to collaborate in the rule drafting and move this process forward, starting as early as next week.

Number One -- I adamantly agree with the General Assembly that no surgery of this kind should ever be performed on those under the age of 18. I am directing our agencies to draft rules to ban this practice in Ohio.

Number Two -- I share with the Legislature their concerns that there is no comprehensive data regarding persons who receive this care, nor independent analysis of any such data. I am today directing our agencies to immediately draft rules to require reporting to the relevant agencies and

to report this data to the General Assembly and the public every six months. We will do this not only when the patients are minors, but also when the patients are adults.

Number Three -- I share the Legislature's concerns about clinics that may pop up and try to sell patients inadequate or even ideological treatments. This is a concern shared by people I spoke with who had both positive experiences and negative experiences with their own treatments. Those who had positive experiences all noted that they received significant counseling, therapy, and consultation as a family before discussing even the possibility of other treatments. Those who had negative experiences report that they did not receive adequate counseling.

Therefore, I am directing our agencies to draft rules that establish restrictions that prevent pop-up clinics or fly-by-night operations and provide important protections for Ohio children and their families and for adults.

I truly believe that we can collaborate, find common ground, adopt rules to protect Ohio children and families in this area. It will be my goal in the coming weeks to get these protections adopted through a collaborative and deliberative process.

Thank you, and I am happy to take questions.