December 15th, 2023

The Honorable Mike DeWine
Governor
State of Ohio
77 S. High St. 30th floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

RE: VETO REQUEST OF HOUSE BILL 68

Dear Governor DeWine—

On behalf of the above organizations, who represent tens of thousands of healthcare providers that serve millions of Ohio citizens, we are writing today to urge you to veto House Bill 68. This harmful legislation strips away parental rights and diminishes care for extremely vulnerable children.

Since taking office, you and your administration have prioritized child health and wellness. Our organizations have been proud to support your efforts to address the pediatric behavioral health crisis, respond to emergent public health issues, and expand services for multi-system youth. We believe that the work of your administration has saved lives. Our members share these goals and are committed to providing the best care possible for all patients. And just like you, many have dedicated their lives to caring for Ohio children.

With this commitment in mind, we are writing to ask that you veto House Bill 68, which was passed earlier this week by the Ohio General Assembly. Sponsored by State Representative Gary Click, this legislation is built upon the faulty premise that our members are harming children simply by providing the best, evidence-based care they can. To advance this measure, supporters have demonized providers and parents alike and pushed misinformation in order to deny care to an incredibly small number of Ohio children. Simply put, this bill takes away parental rights and will harm Ohio kids.

Children struggling with their gender identity require comprehensive, multi-disciplinary care from qualified professionals. Those whose distress is serious enough to necessitate a diagnosis of gender dysphoria need even more resources and support, as do their parents. This population has a very high incidence of suicide. And in some extreme cases, there are pharmaceutical therapies that can help increase the efficacy of behavioral health interventions. As is the case with any drug or treatment, there are risks and side effects. All of this is shared with parents and informed consent is obtained from parents before any services or treatments are administered.

Lastly, our providers do not recommend nor support gender transition surgeries for minors. These surgeries are not available at any Ohio children's hospital, and we have no objection to the ban on these surgeries contained in HB 68. Our main concerns deal with the prohibition on any pharmaceutical therapy for children and adolescents with gender dysphoria, as well as language restricting the ability of providers to even discuss these options with parents. We worked diligently with lawmakers to amend these provisions and adopt a standard of care that will allow us to care for all children, however those changes were rejected.

The vast majority of children with gender dysphoria can be served with behavioral health interventions; however, those in extreme situations that may necessitate drug therapy are also the ones who are most likely to attempt suicide. By taking away the full range of options for parents of these children, HB 68 creates an increased risk for suicide and other adverse outcomes. Again, we must stress that this is an extraordinarily small number of children who require a high acuity of care; however, should HB 68 become effective, these children will suffer the most.

HB 68 also contains a ban on transgender girls playing youth sports in Ohio. We believe that the current guidelines in place from the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) adequately protect women's sports while creating a pathway for a small number of transgender girls to participate. In the prior school year, OHSAA granted six waivers statewide. These children must be receiving hormone therapy for at least six months, have a letter signed by their physician attesting they do not possess any significant physical advantages, and have their waiver reviewed by a committee. All children benefit from participation in team sports in middle school and high school, both socially and academically, and the handful of transgender girls playing sports at this level have been welcomed by their teammates and competitors alike. This provision denies them a small, but meaningful activity that is essential for their happiness.

We want to stress that the mere existence of HB 68 has already caused harm to transgender youth in Ohio. These children already face bullying and may struggle from other behavioral health issues. Being targeted by the Ohio General Assembly is just one more challenge for them. We know that your colleagues in the legislature share our passion for child wellness; however, HB 68 runs contrary to this goal. A veto will send a clear message that this bill is harmful.

In closing, we want to note that our members were just a few of the hundreds of witnesses who testified against HB 68. The parents of transgender children were exclusively on the opposition side, and while there are many passionate voices on both sides of this debate, we feel that these parents and their children deserve a veto of this legislation. We appreciate your consideration of this request and your lifelong service to Ohio and its children.

Submitted on behalf of—

*Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics*
*Ohio Osteopathic Association*
*National Association of Social Workers, Ohio Chapter*
*Ohio Occupational Therapy Association*
*Ohio Chapter, American College of Surgeons*
*Ohio State Medical Association*
*Ohio Psychiatric Physicians Association*
*Ohio Chapter, American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology*
*Ohio Academy of Family Physicians*
*Ohio Counseling Association*
*Ohio School Psychologists Association*
*Ohio Psychological Association*
*The Academy of Medicine of Cleveland and Northern Ohio*
*Ohio Council of Behavioral Health and Family Services Providers*
*Public Children Services Association of Ohio*