



children's
defense fund
ohio

State Board of Education Public Comment
Kim Eckhart, Interim Director, Children's Defense Fund-Ohio
December 12, 2022

Board President McGuire, Vice President Manchester, and members of Ohio's State Board of Education:

My name is Kim Eckhart, and I am the Interim Director of the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. Born out of the civil rights movement, the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio has been advocating on behalf of Ohio's children for more than forty years. CDF provides a strong, effective, and independent voice for children in Ohio, not because they cannot speak for themselves, but because there are times when their voices are not being heard.

I am here today because I share your commitment to the well-being of all students in Ohio. Because of this, I urge you to reject Board Member Toal's "Resolution to Oppose the Proposed Changes to Title IX and to Affirm Parental Rights and Local Control of Ohio K-12 Education."

As CDF has stated during public comment since September, this resolution poses real harm to students. Let's be clear: This resolution endorses discrimination of students, and they will feel the impact on their school climate. Not only that, but it also encourages local school districts to ignore federal law and risk losing access to school meals, which are a lifeline to many children whose families are struggling to put food on the table.

Students need to feel safe and accepted at school. Positive school climates support their mental and emotional health and allows them to focus on learning. This resolution would have the opposite effect, particularly at a time when youth mental health is a pandemic all its own. In 2020, nearly [one in eight](#) Ohio children received a diagnosis of anxiety, depression or both, a figure up 42% from 2016 – the 10th-highest increase nationwide. We know that these mental health challenges are disproportionately high for LGBTQ+ youth. Rather than endorsing discrimination in schools, we should be focusing our energy on creating positive school cultures and climates that all school children in Ohio deserve. The restored Title IX guidance from the U.S. Department of Education protects LGBTQ+ youth and creates schools safe from discrimination.

I represent an organization committed to amplifying the voices of youth so that their lived expertise is reflected in the policies that impact them. Over the past months, this board has heard from students who urged you to reject this resolution that would make already challenging conditions in their schools worse. I stand with them today in urging you to vote no on this harmful resolution. Instead, take up policies that build up and celebrate our students, viewing them as assets to their communities and our state's future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today against this resolution.