

My name is Helena Kerschner and I am a 24 year old resident of Ohio. I am a detransitioner with grave concerns about the so-called “gender affirming” model of responding to young people who identify as transgender.

As a young girl, I had no history of discomfort with being female. What I did have, however, was a history of family issues, difficulties fitting in with other girls, eating disorders, self harm, and depression. When I was 14, I was socially isolated and began spending a lot of time online. On social media, I was immersed in an environment which harshly stigmatized people who were straight, white, and not transgender. Identifying as transgender was celebrated, and people who did receive special attention and acceptance. As a socially struggling teen, this had a big effect on me. I also read many things that encouraged me to view all of my social, emotional, and body image difficulties as signs of gender dysphoria. For example, influencers would explain that not liking your body is a sign of being transgender. The narrative was that all of these problems were actually gender dysphoria, and that “transitioning” would be my only chance at being happy in life. The alternative, according to the narrative, which I believed, was suicide. This drove my anxiety and desperation to become much worse, which I then interpreted as a worsening of gender dysphoria and more evidence that I needed to “transition” as soon as possible. By age 17, I identified as a “trans boy” and was fully convinced that my only chance at living a happy life would be to take hormones and undergo surgeries to change my body.

My school counselor and school therapist both agreed with my beliefs, and the psychologist even told my mother that I was at risk for suicide if she would not agree to testosterone treatments, but she thankfully maintained her position not to allow it. I made an appointment at a Planned Parenthood a few weeks after my 18th birthday. The appointment took about one hour and none of the clinicians I saw were interested in what was behind my desperation to change my body. They told me that because I seemed “so sure”, they would forgo doing blood tests and prescribe the hormones that day. I told the clinicians that I wanted a high dose, because I wanted to see more changes in my body. They agreed, and prescribed me 100mg of testosterone per week.

Very soon, I began to experience drastic changes to my emotions. I physically lost the ability to cry; when the desire arose my body refused to produce tears. I began experiencing uncontrollable episodes of rage and paranoia, where I was a danger to myself and others. I lost control over my body in many ways. This had an extremely negative effect on my mental health, and unfortunately I blamed it on myself and believed I had developed a new mental illness. After about eight to 10 months on the testosterone, these episodes of what can only be described as delusion escalated and I was hospitalized. I was hospitalized twice due to the effects testosterone had on my mind and body. None of the clinicians in the hospital or outpatient center ever mentioned testosterone as a possible source for my mysterious symptoms. Instead, I was prescribed a litany of psychiatric drugs. This time was so dark that it caused me to question the original promises of a joyful trans life, and in February of 2018 I stopped taking testosterone and began the journey of detransitioning. My mysterious mental illness went away soon after and has never returned.

I am very fortunate to have not experienced any obvious long-term health detriments, and few permanent aesthetic changes. Many others with similar trajectories can not say the same. But the impact this experience has had on my life can not be overstated. Not only was my life in serious danger due to the reckless and nonsensical prescription of testosterone, but the mental process of undoing that harmful belief system, putting the pieces of my life back together after the events I have described here in modest detail, and facing the emotional issues that made me vulnerable to this in the first place, has been a long and painful process that I have yet to fully complete. I am thankful every single day that this was not done to me when I was younger, even though back then in my ignorance and youth I would have asked for it.

I ask the committee to act to protect children and teens from this dangerous movement.