

Dear Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee:

My name is AJ Casey and I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act.

As a leader within the LGBTQ community, I have witnessed the devastating effects of discrimination in the lives of queer and transgender people. In addition to the persistent fear of loss that many members of this community experience, they also deal with the concomitant sense of dread and isolation that comes from being singled out and treated unfairly...or even violently. Discrimination on any level is simply un-American.

We decided in this country long ago that discrimination is wrong, and that the government has a role to play in putting a stop to it. Most Ohioans and Ohio businesses support protections against discrimination. Nearly three quarters of Ohioans favor employment and housing laws that make it illegal to discriminate based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Currently, 26 localities in Ohio already offer these protections, but it's a patchwork—you can literally work in one place, live in another, and lose your rights on your morning commute. That's why the state needs to step in and close up the gaps.

Ohio needs to have an “open for business” sign through policies that attract and retain the brightest and most talented employees and leaders. Top corporations are reluctant to locate their businesses here or move talented executives here without laws that would ensure their employees happiness.

Hundreds of corporations, universities, professional service firms, and small and medium businesses have already signed on to the Ohio Business Competes coalition in support of statewide policy protecting LGBTQ people from discrimination.

I urge you to pass House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.