

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Amanda Everitt, and I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act.

I am a non-profit leader, board member for Equality Ohio, and most importantly, I am the mother of five children. I chose Lancaster, Ohio as my home 20 years ago after giving up the city life of Toronto, New York, and then Cincinnati. This small town has become my home and I am raising my children to love their great state and be active in creating a better community through volunteer work. My husband, a retired commander in the United States Navy, shares my love of community and collectively, we volunteer on over 9 boards and volunteer countless hours with our teenagers in tow in our rural community. We do this because we want to make sure that our children feel connected to Lancaster. We are instilling a sense of responsibility in them. If you want a better place you must MAKE a better place. We want them to love the place that they live and hopefully make a life for themselves here when they are grown. What troubles our family most is that currently, one of our own does not have the same rights as the others. Our oldest daughter is a trans woman. It is difficult to instill a love of community and commitment to Ohio when Ohio is leaving one of her own, unprotected.

A rural community with few resources for LGBTQ Ohioans, I have been comforted by the support and acceptance my daughter has received. Growing up in more metropolitan communities, education about the LGBTQ community was prevalent. Ignorance usually leads to fear, and living in Lancaster, I was concerned that the community would not support who she was. The beauty of our community is that they WANT to learn. They WANT to accept. Our journey here has been mostly positive but we know that not all people are open to that education. We worry that our daughter, a trans woman with the added layer of having autism, is at risk every day of being discriminated against. How are we to instill a love of home in our children when we have to explain to them that their sister does not have the same protections that they enjoy?

As a community leader, I have the opportunity to recruit and retain businesses in the heart of my small city. The majority of these businesses value protections for LGBTQ+ persons. We need to be able to attract the best and brightest if we wish to make Ohio a stronger state for businesses and families of all configurations. Ohio is a state that is built on the ideals of fairness and opportunity. That should be reflected in our laws.

Everyone should have the right to put in an honest day's work. I am not asking that my daughter have anything more than my other children have; we only want her to have the same basic rights and protections. Our family was recently featured on the cover of Lancaster Living, a local publication that titled our issue, *The Everitts, Pillars of our Community*. We were recognized for our work in this rural community with local government, businesses, health and human service agencies, and farmers alike. Many share our concerns; they have someone in their life that Ohio isn't protecting either. They are afraid and they don't know where they will go if we can't achieve these basic principles. I love Ohio. Will our family that has invested SO much in our small town, have to leave to insure basic protections for our children? I am hopeful that this committee will see fit to move this legislation forward towards a vote so that we can continue to invest our time, talent and treasure in Ohio.

Please vote yes on House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Amanda Everitt
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