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Testimony in support of House Bill 369, The Ohio Fairness Act

Hello, my name is Anita Winning and I have lived in Ohio for almost twenty years with my family. I am in support of House Bill 369, The Ohio Fairness Act for both ethical and pragmatic reasons. Morally, I believe that all people are created equally with no regard to race, creed, or sexual orientation. The right to be able to live without fear of facing discrimination because of the color of our skin, the God we pray to, who we love or our sexual orientation is a founding principal of our country and state. We have recognized the importance of extending protection to some but now we need to do so for all, including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer. As a teacher of middle school students, I see the struggles everyday of students in the LGBTQ community to feel valued in our society and we need to implement statewide policies that affirm and support them. Pragmatically, it makes both business and fiscal sense to enact comprehensive laws to protect all of our citizens including those of all sexual orientations.

In the last 18 to 20 years, school administrators, lawmakers and citizens have become increasingly more aware that one of our most vulnerable populations in our schools are those in the LGBTQ community. This impact can be felt at every rung of the educational ladder. There have been policies that have been enacted, however, inconsistencies still remain between state and district policies. This leaves both students and teachers vulnerable. Currently, Ohio falls into this category of offering inconsistent protections. In order to make all our citizens feel valued, protected and safe, we as state need to send a message that discrimination is not tolerated for any group.

According to Rueters, the Trevor Project, and the CDC there is a significant increase in suicide rates over time and it is now the second leading cause of death for young people before the age of 25. The CDC's report "Suicide and Mortality in the United States, 1999-2017" states that, "Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are more than four times more likely to attempt suicide than their straight peers, and nearly half of all transgender people have attempted suicide". Many face bullying, physical and physiological threats, discriminatory practices and exclusion which impacts their education. It is now more important than ever to dedicate resources to address this issue. The reports all state that in-depth research, access to healthcare, education and legislation are needed to combat this trend. We should not downplay or ignore the importance of legislation in protecting all Ohioans.

If we look at the issue of discrimination in a pragmatic way, we need only look at the trend of our youth leaving Ohio. According to a report in 2018 conducted annually by United Van Lines, in which Ohio ranked number six overall for people leaving the state, sixteen point nine percent (16.9%) of those who relocate are retirees but the largest group by far were those between the ages of 18-34. In order for Ohio to combat this trend we need to reinvent ourselves and attract new vibrant economies. Our youth are very supportive of equal protections for all citizens and

migrate to cities and states that embrace a diverse workforce. This can only occur when all citizens are equally protected under the law.

In cities and states where members of the LBGTQ community are denied equal rights and protections there are negative economic implications. Corporations are hesitant to locate in states with less protections for their workers which translates to less vibrant economies. The Marguerite Casey Foundation has found, “In an increasingly knowledge-based economy, urban economists uplift the role of tolerance in driving economic growth because talented, high-skilled workers are drawn to diverse cities”. Younger constituents favor inclusionary practices and this translates into economic fallout.

In closing, I would like to share a quote from the Trevor Project, “No person, no home, no community can be beyond the reach of this call”. We need to extend legal protections to all citizens of Ohio. WE need to send the signal to our LBGTQ youth that they are equally valuable. Whether you vote to extend these protections for moral or fiscal reasons , please respectfully consider doing so. House Bill 369 needs to pass in order for Ohio to be on the right side of history, morally and pragmatically.