

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Austin Johnson, an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Kenyon College, and I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act.

I know what discrimination feels like because it's happened to me. When I began my own transition 10 years ago, I tried to make an appointment with many doctors, just trying to receive basic care related to my transition. Office after office said no, refusing to serve me – and when I did finally find someone to safely prescribe me the hormones I needed, the provider snarled at me, "I'm doing this because I took an oath." The clinical staff didn't ask me questions about my life or my medical history, they hardly returned eye contact, and I got the message loud and clear that the staff was uncomfortable. The provider ultimately gave me a prescription for hormones without instructing me on how to use them safely, where to inject them, or how to prepare for the injection. And when I went to fill the prescription, I was turned away from a few pharmacies who didn't want to serve transgender people.

Unfortunately, 10 years later, I know that the discomfort I felt and the discrimination I experienced is not uncommon for transgender people today. In my own work as a Sociologist at Kenyon College and as Research Director at the Campaign for Southern Equality, my research focuses on the health experiences of LGBTQ people. I've personally heard hundreds of stories like mine and many where the discrimination or harassment was much worse. National data shows that around 1 in 5 trans people have been refused care because of their gender identity; over a third of trans Ohioans have been mistreated by providers, over a quarter of trans Ohioans avoid or delay care out of fear of mistreatment. Discrimination undermines a person's direct access to services or basic human necessities and then further, over time, breaks down self-worth and sours a person's worldview. When you've been treated with disrespect, you begin to expect it, and it's partly why people in the LGBTQ community grapple disproportionately with depression, anxiety, and suicidality.

The truth is that the majority of Ohioans and Ohio businesses support these protections, almost three quarters favor laws that make it illegal to discriminate based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Ohioans recognize that their neighbors and fellow citizens deserve dignity and respect. Passing the Ohio Fairness Act is a necessary step toward correcting the injustices that LGBTQ people face every single day. It would grant LGBTQ folks crucial protections from discrimination and would send a message nationwide that LGBTQ people deserve respect, dignity, and equality. I urge you to pass the Ohio Fairness Act. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Please vote yes on House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Austin Johnson
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