

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

The Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio is pleased to submit this statement in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act. As a statewide coalition of organizations and individuals committed to ending homelessness and promoting decent, safe, fair, affordable housing for all, we know just how important it is to provide Ohioans with the opportunities they need to thrive. All Ohioans should be afforded fair and equitable treatment in employment, housing, and public accommodations. All Ohioans should be able to live and work without fear of discrimination. As a homeless and housing advocacy organization, we know that this is especially important for populations that often experience marginalization and mistreatment, such as the LGBTQ community. HB 369 would provide those that identify as LGBTQ with the security and confidence needed to live full, healthy, and productive lives.

Some critics of this bill have put forward that HB 369 will force homeless and domestic violence shelters to allow biological men into their facilities. This argument stems from two misunderstandings.

First, it is based on a lack of awareness of the mainstream and widely accepted policies and practices of shelters in Ohio. The Department of Housing and Urban Development requires that all housing programs and shelters funded by the agency are open to all eligible individuals and families regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. In order to qualify for HUD funding, shelters must treat LGBTQ people with fairness and decency, respecting their safety concerns and housing them appropriately. This has not produced any additional safety or security issues. In fact, it has made it safer and easier for LGBTQ individuals experiencing homelessness to access the shelter and assistance they need.

Second the statement is also based on a misunderstanding about what it is to be transgender. To be clear, transgender women are not biological men -- they are women. And transgender men are simply men. They go to work, contribute to their communities, participate in civic life, and raise families – just like the rest of us. And they should be treated with dignity and respect.

HB 369 will not place an additional burden on Ohio's shelters. HB 369 will instead reinforce the existing policies with which the overwhelming majority of our state's shelters already comply.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We support passage of HB 369.

Bill Faith  
Executive Director