

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak to HB 369, The Ohio Fairness Act. My name is Bobbi Ullinger. I am many things. I am married to the woman that I have loved for over 40 years, and together we have parented 5 children and are grandparents to 6. As an audio technician for a small production company I make rock bands loud, among other things, and as a former small business owner I designed and installed sound systems in churches. As a veteran of the fire service I rushed into burning buildings as most people were running out, and I cared for people who were taking their last breath and delivered babies taking their first breath. As a Christian I spread the Good News, I love God and my neighbors, and I treat others the way that I would like to be treated. And as a trans-person I have experienced the stigma of being viewed as less than, the fear of being despised, and the anguish of being discriminated against.

Today I am here to ask you to pass a law that would extend to me the same rights that are enjoyed by most Americans, but denied to those of us who are singled out, not for our lack of ability or contribution, but for being the persons that we have been created to be. I did not choose to be transgender, just as our youngest son did not choose to be gay. Although I did not have the language at the time to describe how I felt, I knew I was different from the time I was 5 or 6 years old. And from the time I was 5 or 6 years old I knew that being different was something that I needed to hide, especially being different in the way that I felt. Today I am here to ask you to make a decision that will effect not only my life and the life of our youngest son, but the lives of the 5 or 6 year olds that are just now coming to realize that they are different.

Decisions are shaped by the experiences, morals, and beliefs of those deciding. The decisions that I would make, for example, would be shaped by my experiences, morals, and beliefs that I just described. Decisions that I would make would be in the best interests of families, because I value family and see it as one of the foundations of society. My decisions would benefit small business, because I work for a small business and have owned a small business, and I know the importance of small businesses to our community. My decisions are shaped by my experiences as a professional firefighter/paramedic and the needs of the community that I served for 26 years providing service to all persons equally regardless of their perceived status within society.

And my decisions are influenced by my Christian faith. As a Christian there are 3 principles that guide my decisions. First, they must encourage me to treat others as I would want to be treated. Second, they must bare good fruit rather than bad fruit. And lastly, they must lead me to love God and to love my neighbor. For the first principle let me use the example that has been very publicized, involving a baker, a couple in love, and a wedding cake. It should be no surprise that, as a trans person I would support the gay couple. But it may be surprising that this is because of my Christian values more than my gender identity. It may also be surprising that I can sympathize with the baker. You see, when I owned my small business, I was asked to design and install a sound system for a particular customer, a non-denominational, Christian church in Akron. As part of my assessment of the needs of the church I attended one of their Sunday morning services. The message that I heard there was nothing like any Christian message that I had ever heard, and was filled with what, in my opinion, were falsehoods and total misunderstandings of Scripture. I was conflicted. If I installed the system, I would be helping

them to spread their hateful interpretation of Scripture. I would not only appear to condone this message, but I would be complicit in its dissemination. However, if I refused to supply them with the best system they could afford, I would not be living up to that first principle. I would not be treating that congregation the way that I would want to be treated. I would not want them or anyone else to dictate or to hinder the way that I worship God. Since then I have repeatedly found myself in similar situations, and I have always tried to give those congregations the same, if not better work, that I would give a congregation with which I agree.

When I look at the fruit that HB 369 would bare when compared to the current fruit of not having this law, The Ohio Fairness Act would bare good fruit. Currently, the LGBTQ community makes up somewhere between 3 and 5 percent of the total population. However, out of homeless youth in the United States, 40% identify as LGBTQ. That's a huge number that are not living productive lives because it is legal and accepted to fire a person because they are gay or trans. That is a huge number that are showing up on our cities' streets because it is legal and acceptable to deny a person housing because they are gay or trans. That is a huge number of people that are being disowned by their families, kicked out by their parents, because it is legal to stigmatize people by denying them service and public accommodation, effectively making them second class citizens, making them less than. Because of this stigma and the hardships that are placed on the LGBTQ community, suicide rates for LGBTQ kids are also obscenely high. Passing HB 369 would help to reduce this stigma and help to give LGBTQ youth an improved self esteem. It would help to reduce the homeless and unemployment rates within the LGBTQ community by leveling the playing field and effectively eliminating second class citizenship.

The third Christian principle that guides me is love of my neighbor. This, to me, means protecting my neighbor, protecting them from stigma, protecting them from poverty, and protecting them from homelessness, all of which The Ohio Fairness Act would do. As a person who values family, a productive person within my community, a retired firefighter/paramedic, a Christian, and a trans-person, I support HB 369, and respectfully ask you to pass The Ohio Fairness Act into law. And I am available to you to answer any questions you may have regarding the LGBTQ community, and my faith and life within that community.

Sincerely,  
Bobbi Ullinger