

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

My name is Caroline Ferro and I would like to express my support for the Ohio Fairness Act, House Bill 369. I was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky, and I spent my childhood and early adolescence lying to everyone I knew. I lived under the assumption that any love or support I received was conditional, and that if anyone was to find out who I was then I would lose friends, family, and my own future. Most of all, I would have to admit to myself what I had always known but never had the words for – I was a guy and transgender.

I had been taught to hate myself before I even knew myself. It took a few years for me to come to terms with and embrace who I was. It wasn't the outright hate that kept me closeted and afraid – it was the people who couldn't be bothered to care either way. It wasn't the people who wanted me dead, but the many more who didn't care whether I lived or died; it was the bystanders, the people who watched and did nothing. It was the people who wouldn't discriminate themselves but supported the right of others to do so. They spoke with their silence and I heard them loud and clear.

However, that is long past, and I am no longer in Kentucky. I came to Ohio for school and am currently a second-year student at Ohio State. I went to high school in Bowling Green, Kentucky at Western Kentucky University. I saw my peers fight for a fairness ordinance in Bowling Green. I listened to them worry about their jobs, their safety, saw them cry as they stood up and shared their stories in front of the Bowling Green City Commission. The city commission was unmoved, but what I heard changed me forever and if I could share it with you then I would. I was proud of who I was, and I wanted to be part of my community – but my community was not proud of me. I believe that coming to Ohio State was the right choice for me. I believe that this is a place where people can stand against oppression and do what is right. It is up to you to prove me right.

I could tell you about the people who are leaving, taking their talents with them to other states that will give them protections that Ohio does not. I could tell you about the people already here, the nearly ¾ of Ohioans who support the Ohio Fairness Act already. I could tell you about the economic losses, the opportunities that could never be as is. I won't tell you about these things. I will, however, tell you that there are people who need your protection. I will also tell you that there are children in this state who hate themselves, who will kill themselves because of people who stand by. All that I ask of you is to recognize me as a person who deserves as much of a chance at happiness as anyone else. I've spent too much time and energy justifying my right to exist to expect anyone to change their mind about me. That said, if you could at least think about my story, and the countless others, I hope it may make you realize the simple truth that -- we are people, too.

Make Ohio a safer place.

Sincerely,
Caroline Ferro