

**Proponent Testimony for House Bill 369 Senate Judiciary Committee
Chris Cicchinelli, Pure Romance CEO and Founder of Living With
Change**

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Chris Cicchinelli and I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act. As a business owner, and a father of a transgender child I urge you to support HB369.

Despite the multitudes of existing identities, we share a common desire- to live free of harassment and prejudice predicated on the nature of our identity. While many of us have had the privilege to enjoy protection from institutional discrimination, the time has come to extend these safeguards to those currently at risk to nonsensical, needless fear and suffering resulting from their gender identity or sexual orientation.

For 18 years I have been the CEO of Pure Romance. It has grown to a network of 30,000 women with revenues of \$250 million a year. Our mission is to empower these entrepreneurs that come from many different backgrounds and encourage them to be the best version of themselves. The corporate culture at Pure Romance is built on inclusive principles. We value diversity and want each employee to feel completely at home in their work environment.

Diversity and inclusion are integral in cultivating stronger partnerships and growing all businesses in Ohio. HB369 will allow the 400,000 LGBTQ+ Ohioans the freedom to work, retain and attract the best talent with healthy work environments, increase output, and encourage outside investment. As an employer I view this as the definition of a win-win scenario that will ensure businesses like mine continue to thrive.

Many LGBTQ+ Ohioans currently carry the risk of termination, face discrimination in housing, and refusal of services or care all because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. With this added burden it is no wonder that the attempted suicide rate among this population is 10 times that of the general population.

For me, this is a harsh and terrifying reality. My daughter is transgender and there is not a day that goes by that I do not fear for her future. It is because of the dangers facing our child, and other transgender children that my wife, Jessica, and I founded Living With Change.

Partnered with the nationally recognized Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Living With Change is a philanthropic effort founded to support and advocate for LGBTQ+ youth. Excellent progress has been made by Living with Change to increasing available resources and fostering social change, but without legal protections for this vulnerable population they will not be able to live as freely as the rest of us. I personally committed \$2 million dollars to this cause in January of 2018 and will continue to advocate for the civil liberties of marginalized

populations. I know this is an uphill battle, but I believe we can improve our communities and our state if we all keep pushing for equality.

The expansive protections of HB369 will inspire hope and have the ability to save lives. *You*, have the ability to save lives with your decision to support this bill. It makes good business sense and is compassionate; therefore, it should be an easy decision to take a stand here on the right side of history.

Thank you for your consideration.