

**delfin bautista Testimony on behalf of Southeastern Ohio Rainbow Alliance (SEORA) in Support of Ohio Fairness Act (HB 369)**

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

My name is delfin bautista, I am a trans person of color who lives in Athens and serves on the Board of Directors of the Southeastern Ohio Rainbow Alliance. I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act, an important piece of legislation that seeks to protect the dignity and livelihood of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression.

As an organization that addresses the needs of the LGBTQ community in Southeast Ohio we are mindful that many in our region have no recourse under state law if they are discriminated against due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. A recent study by the National Center for Transgender Equality highlights the disproportionate number of transgender individuals who experience discrimination and harassment; reporting that 63% of transgender individuals had experienced a serious act of discrimination that majorly impacted their life, and 23% had experienced a “catastrophic” level of discrimination. As just one example, 26% had lost a job and 50% were harassed on the job for being trans or gender non-conforming. The lack of recourse for undue discrimination and harassment in Ohio relegates LGBTQ citizens to second-class citizenship, creating a life of struggle and hardship to prove one’s personhood, worth, dignity.

This same study showed that of the nearly 1000 respondents in the state of Ohio, “30% of those who held or applied for a job during that year reported being fired, being denied a promotion, or not being hired for a job they applied for because of their gender identity or expression” (US Trans Survey, 2015, Ohio report). I can continue to cite statistics to demonstrate the impact of discrimination on LGBTQ individuals, but I am also a firm believer in the power of story. For the last 7 years I have lived in Athens, OH and have worked with the lgbtq community in various capacities. I have met many individuals both within and beyond Athens who have shared the pain of being misgendered and harassed in local businesses, of being ostracized for being perceived to be in the wrong restroom, individuals staying silent when coworkers were harassed or made fun for fear that defending their LGBTQ colleague / co-worker would have negative consequences for them, and of couples saying they were roommates due to fear of being kicked out of their apartments. I met a group of LGBTQ young people who were physically assaulted to the point that two of their group were hospitalized and one had to be air lifted to Columbus because our local hospital was not able to treat their injuries. Despite public outcry, the assault was not treated as a hate-crime as our state law does not include sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. I have met and continue to meet many folks in our region who feel isolated and without community.

Athens is a city that has made a commitment to protecting all of its residents which is

why I chose to live there with my family when we moved to Ohio; however, not everyone is able to or should have to relocate themselves or their families to feel safe and secure in their home community. Appalachian culture stresses the importance of community and communal ties; the lack of protections for LGBTQ individuals in Southeast Ohio and in all of Ohio is shattering lives and communities.

I have tried to embody solidarity be with those being treated unjustly over the years, but I also have experienced discrimination and hardship as a trans and queer person of color—salary inequity, expertise and experiences devalued, being singled out through intimidation tactics, my character and professionalism defamed, and ultimately termination. When I raised concerns by filing a complaint, I was told that yes I was being mistreated but I had no case or recourse due to the lack of protections for LGBTQ individuals in the workplace in the state of Ohio.

All of us within the LGBTQ community are people, period. We are church-goers, employees, employers, tax-payers, students, voters, members of families, and heads of households. Many of us are harassed, denied housing, unjustly fired, and victims of hate crimes—why, simply because we are who we are and because we seek to live a life with authenticity and integrity. It is unjust that under current Ohio state law ALL does not truly mean ALL and equality does not fully embrace all.

On behalf of SEORA and on behalf of myself, I ask that you as lawmakers ensure that ALL people in Ohio are treated and protected as full persons. I ask that you follow the leads of other states and the District of Columbia to expand protections regarding housing, employment, and public accommodation so that all residents may live their lives free of discrimination, harassment, and violence. I humbly beseech and demand that you ensure that all Ohioans and those of us who have come to call Ohio home can truly be at home in this state.

As our elected representatives you represent LGBTQ children, adults, couples, and families in your districts. Do not relegate your own constituents to the silence of the margins. Instead, ensure that our inherent worth and dignity is embraced and celebrated with equity and compassion.

Please support the Ohio Fairness Act.

Thank you for your time and for this opportunity to offer the Southeastern Ohio Rainbow Alliance's support and my own support for this important and much needed piece of legislation.

Queerful regards,  
delfin bautista, MSW, MDiv.  
Communications Director  
Southeastern Ohio Rainbow Alliance