

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Erika Frankel and I own Hammer Data Systems, LCC, a software development company in Garrettsville, Ohio. I support House Bill 369.

I have employees and family members who are gay. I have employees and family members who are transgender. On behalf of my company, I have passed up contract work, declined speaking engagements, and refused to exhibit at industry events in places that have denied, withdrawn, or interfered with equal protection based on gender and/or sexual orientation. I simply do not feel that it is acceptable to send my employees to work in places where they are unsafe or to economically support areas that consider the Ohioans who work for me to be acceptable targets of discrimination for no reason other than who they are.

LGBTQ Ohioans want nothing more than the same basic rights afforded to others. They seek the right to purchase goods from a store or to order a meal without being judged. They want to rent a safe place to live. They want to use a public restroom without fear of violence or questioning by authorities for the “crime” of simply existing. They want the everyday things that those of us who are not LGBTQ take for granted. I urge this committee to take a moment and imagine life without being able to count on those day-to-day things that we barely notice.

Some may feel that it is unnecessary to specifically state that LGBTQ Ohioans are protected from discrimination, but I disagree. These communities are seeking explicit statements of protection from their cities and states for a reason. They feel unsafe – citizens that you represent feel truly, physically unsafe – and they are asking you to tell everyone in no uncertain terms that Ohio is not okay with that. I am also asking you to do so. These non-discrimination laws generate no increase in public safety incidents, but they do send an important message that the city or state enacting these laws believes in equal rights for all of its citizens.

Religious freedom is the freedom to hold a personal faith without discrimination. It is not the freedom to visit discrimination upon others in the name of that faith. Faith instructs me to look to my own heart and soul, to resist the temptation to judge others and certainly to resist acting on that judgment, to give all I have in the service of others, and to love my neighbor above all other considerations except loving God. What people choose for themselves in terms of how they interpret the demands of their faith cannot be permitted by law to be imposed on others in the spaces we share, including our workplaces and public establishments. God cannot be limited by secular law to a single voice. I should not have to convince every clerk and checkout person that I am sufficiently moral to purchase laundry detergent or use the public restroom. Neither should LGBTQ Ohioans.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.