

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Hallie Stelzle, and I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act.

For me, this bill is very personal. As someone who identifies as a member the LGBTQ+ community, and who is surrounded by people who also identify within this community, I feel that these are necessary protections for this marginalized group. In fact, since being in college, I have surrounded myself with other students who also identify as LGBTQ+. With most of my close friends and loved ones being in this group, it scares me to know how they may face discrimination, with something as basic as having a home. This bill is important to me because the thought of my loved ones, or myself, being at risk of homelessness, or exclusion from services as a result of identity or expression is not my idea of freedom.

The whole concept of equality is important to me, because from my perspective, equality is about justice, and treating humans with basic respect. This bill promotes this basic concept of treating people with dignity, regardless of how they identify, what they look like, or who they love. While I understand the importance of religious freedom in business settings specifically, I feel that when you agree to serve people, you are agreeing to serve all people, and excluding those who identify as LGBTQ+ is a dehumanizing, and dignity-stripping act.

I believe that equality is important for Ohio because it reflects the needs of the people who call Ohio home. Ohio has always been a place I consider to be warm and inviting, and with the Ohio Fairness Act, I firmly believe that myself, and others will be able to more confidently call Ohio a safe, and welcoming place. This matters for Ohio, because of just how much of our population identifies with this community. According to the Williams Institute, approximately 4.3% of Ohio's population identifies as LGBTQ+. This bill is standing up for this 4.3%, and anyone else who may face discrimination on this basis.

I urge you to pass House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Hallie Stelzle