



TESTIMONY OF:

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WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF:

House Bill 369
House Civil Justice Committee
February 04, 2020

Chair Hambley, Vice-Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and distinguished members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act.

My name is Erin Ryan and I serve as the Managing Director of the Ohio Women's Public Policy Network, a coalition of nearly 40 organizations working collaboratively to advocate for public policy solutions that build economic opportunity for women and families.

We recognize that historically our country's laws and policies have reinforced and perpetuated gender discrimination, structural and institutional racism, and bias against marginalized communities, including the LGBTQ community. The Women's Public Policy Network is dedicated to confronting and addressing these barriers by championing policies that advance equity and opportunity, and urge policymakers to advance policy solutions centered in equity, fairness, and justice that address the following issue areas:

1. Promoting economic security for women and families;
2. Ensuring fairness and opportunity in the workplace; and
3. Improving women's health and well-being

These shared goals shaped our interest in testifying today in support of House Bill 369, bipartisan legislation that would update the Ohio Civil Rights law to prohibit discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. **We strongly urge passage of this long overdue legislation that would at last allow LGBTQ Ohioans the right to live, work and simply *exist* with the same legal protections from discrimination as every other Ohioan.**

The passage of the Ohio Fairness Act is not only morally the right thing to do; it is also the right thing for Ohio residents, families, communities and businesses, and throughout our state, there is mounting momentum supporting the passage of legislation. Over the course of the last few years, nearly 800 businesses have joined Ohio Business Competes, a coalition of business voices supporting non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ Ohioans. One of Governor DeWine's first actions upon being sworn in as governor was issuing a series of Executive Orders, including one that provides state workers with protections from discrimination on the basis of sexual

orientation and gender identity or expression. And at the local level, a growing list of nearly 30 localities, representing communities throughout our state, have enacted LGBTQ-inclusive non-discrimination protections for their residents.

Now it is the time for our state to act to provide non-discrimination protections to all LGBTQ Ohioans, regardless of where they live or where they work. With the Ohio Fairness Act, Ohio has the opportunity to join the twenty other states in the country that have taken action to provide protections at the state level from discrimination for LGBTQ people.

Passage of this legislation will send a message to Ohioans, and our country, that we are a state built on the foundation of equity, inclusion, and fairness for all residents – and it will have a distinct impact on the lives and well-being of LGBTQ Ohioans and their families, especially among communities of color – and particularly transgender communities of color – who are disproportionately vulnerable to experiencing discrimination.

Without the basic protections from discrimination that this bill provides, LGBTQ Ohioans can legally be fired or denied a job because of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

National research from 2017 found that one-fifth, or 20%, of LGBTQ Americans report having experienced discrimination when applying for jobs.¹ And LGBTQ people of color reported higher rates of experiencing workplace discrimination than white LGBTQ people (32% compared to 13% respectively).² This same research found that transgender workers disproportionately experience discrimination or harassment within the workplace, with 80% of the transgender population who are employed reporting that they experienced harassment or mistreatment in their place of employment or are taking steps to actively avoid it at work.

Discrimination against LGBTQ Ohioans within the workplace, or during the hiring process, can create hostile work environments, prevent employees from being their true selves, and ultimately strip away the ability to remain economically secure and provide for themselves and their families.

In the absence of the non-discrimination protections the Ohio Fairness Act would provide, it is legal for an LGBTQ Ohioan to be denied housing or evicted from their home based on their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression

Research demonstrates that the issue of homelessness and housing insecurity disproportionately affects LGBTQ people, particularly LGBTQ youth who are overrepresented in the homeless youth population, and that they are more likely to face

¹ National Public Radio, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *Discrimination in America: Experiences and Views of LGBTQ Americans* (2017): p. 1

² National Public Radio, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *Discrimination in America: Experiences and Views of LGBTQ Americans* (2017): p. 11.

discrimination in homeless shelters and rental markets. Systemic barriers to economic security, discrimination in housing and employment, and lack of resources stemming from fleeing abuse, social stigma, or rejection from family contribute to this overrepresentation of LGBTQ people, particularly youth and transgender people, in our country's homeless population.

Data from 2019 spearheaded by the Williams Institute at UCLA found that LGBTQ youth make up only 7% of the youth population, but 40% of the homeless youth population.³ Additional research finds that LGBTQ youth are 120% more likely to experience homelessness in comparison to non-LGBTQ youth. Other young adult groups that disproportionately experience homelessness are youth who have not completed high school, youth who report an annual household income of under \$24,000, and youth who are Black or Hispanic.⁴ When LGBTQ youth exist at these identity intersections, they are even more likely to experience homelessness and housing discrimination.

When we fail to address the issue early, overrepresentation of the LGBTQ community in the homeless population extends into adulthood. Currently, 30% of the adult homeless population in the United States is made of LGBTQ people. The failure to prohibit discrimination against LGBTQ Ohioans in housing directly undercuts access to stable, reliable housing, the basic foundation for promoting safety and health.

As a coalition we are unified by one shared vision: an Ohio where all women, particularly low-income women, women of color, and LGBTQ women, have the resources to succeed and the opportunity to lead economically secure, safe, and healthy lives. **House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act, is a foundational piece of legislation that will make that vision a reality, and we strongly urge the committee to support and pass this bill.**

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide written testimony. I am available for questions by email at ryan@innovationohio.org.

Sincerely,

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³ The Williams Institute, UCLA, "Serving Our Youth: Findings from a National Survey of Service Providers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth Who Are Homeless or at Risk of Becoming Homeless." [williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu](http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Durso-Gates-LGBT-Homeless-Youth-Survey-July-2012.pdf), 2012 <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Durso-Gates-LGBT-Homeless-Youth-Survey-July-2012.pdf>

⁴ The Human Rights Campaign <https://www.hrc.org/blog/new-report-on-youth-homeless-affirms-that-lgbtq-youth-disproportionately-ex>