



1108 City Park Avenue, Suite 200  
Columbus, OH 43206  
614.827.0549  
ohiopoveritylawcenter.org

**Testimony in Support of HB 369**  
**Megan O'Dell, Attorney**  
**Ohio Poverty Law Center**  
**House Civil Justice Committee**  
**January 28, 2020**

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Megan O'Dell, and I am an attorney at the Ohio Poverty Law Center. The Ohio Poverty Law Center advocates for evidence-based policies that protect and expand the rights of low-income Ohioans. We are a non-profit law firm working closely with Ohio's legal aid community serving Ohioans who are living, working, and raising their families in poverty. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act.

Legal aid offices around the state offer legal services to indigent individuals, representing them at eviction hearings, obtaining civil protection orders, and assisting them with veteran's benefits, among many other civil legal needs. However, many legal aids are unable to help those in the LGBTQ community due to the lack of protections in the law. For example, if an individual is evicted from their home due to discrimination based on their gender identity, there is no legal recourse in state law. If an individual wants to seek a civil protection order against their abuser, they may be more fearful of being outed through the legal process, as they risk losing employment or housing without legal protections. Not only is there a lack of legal recourse for this type of discrimination, allowing for this type of discrimination to occur in Ohio harms the LGBTQ population, making them more vulnerable to poverty and abuse.

According to the Williams Institute, 11% of LGBTQ people in Ohio do not have employment compared to 5% of those who do not identify as LGBTQ. 33% of LGBTQ people in Ohio are food insecure compared to 16% of those who do not identify as LGBTQ, and 33% of LGBTQ people are earning less than \$24,000 a year compared to 21% of those who do not identify as LGBTQ. This data shows that an individual's identity has a serious effect on their circumstances.

One example of how discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression pushes people into poverty is evidenced by a current Legal Aid Society of Columbus client, a 63-year-old woman who served in the Navy in the Vietnam War, who was denied housing based on her gender identity. She receives veteran's benefits and coordinated with the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Veteran's Affairs, and a local landlord to rent an apartment. The client signed the lease and gave the landlord money for a security deposit. When she went to get the keys to the apartment, the landlord told her he no longer wanted to rent to her and offered no explanation. He also did not return the security deposit. He later told her VA social worker he was likely going to be accused of discrimination based on his unwillingness to rent to the client. Because the landlord refused to rent to her, this veteran was homeless and was forced to live in her car from February to May of 2019. Thankfully, she just obtained stable housing.

Without legal protections for all Ohioans, residents who want to live and work in Ohio are being left behind. Ohio is creating more vulnerable populations and needs to send a clear message that it wants all residents to have stable housing and employment. I urge you to pass House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act. Thank you for your time and consideration.