

Testimony of Jaron M. Terry, MS, APR  
President, Board of Directors, PFLAG Columbus (OH), and an Ohio mother

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

My name is Jaron Terry. I'm an Ohio native operating a sole-practitioner communications business for 24 years. I am here today to say that I support HB 369.

I am representing myself, as the mother of a gay young man who lives in Columbus, and I am also representing the volunteer organization, PFLAG Columbus, of which I am president, Board of Directors. PFLAG Columbus provides education, advocacy and support to parents, families, friends of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) persons as well as LGBT people themselves, through two monthly meetings and representation at various community events.

First, I'd like to share the policy statement of the PFLAG organization, followed by my personal perspective on HB 369. In March 2017, PFLAG National adopted the following Policy Statement on LGBT Individuals as a Protected Class:

“Under U.S. federal law, a protected class is a group of people with a characteristic in common who are for that reason in need of federal protection from discrimination. Current federal protected classes include race, color, religion or creed, national origin or ancestry, sex, age, physical or intellectual disability, veteran status, genetic information and citizenship.

PFLAG believes that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals should be protected from discrimination or harassment under all federal, state and local laws throughout the United States as a protected class. Federal, state and local governments should insert ‘sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression’ along with other protected classes in applicable anti-discrimination laws and repeal current laws that discriminate against LGBT persons.”

And, now I'd like to offer my personal perspective on why I believe HB 369 should become law in Ohio. When our now 28-year-old son came out to my husband and me seven years ago, my first emotion was abject fear. We pretty much knew – from the time he was a toddler – that he most likely was gay.

I share that with you because I want you to understand that our son was born this way. He did not choose to be gay and his sexual orientation cannot be changed. It's simply who he is. So, when he came out to us, my second emotion was relief – relief that he felt comfortable enough at his college, with us as his parents and with himself to be himself.

Why was my first emotion fear? Because I knew that he would be discriminated

against on many fronts. Not only would he face spiritual harm from the church we had been members of – and where he was baptized and confirmed – but also that he would face psychological and financial harm by being discriminated against in finding meaningful employment or being able to live wherever he chose – and most of all I was terrified that he would face physical harm at the hands of people who feel they have a right to beat up on (or worse) a person based on who they are.

As I learned more – including about the protections afforded LGBTQIA+ people within the confines of the City of Columbus – I felt somewhat less afraid because I felt that by being within a city that provided legal protections, he was relatively safer because people who wanted to harm him would know that to do so was against the law. However, what if he has a job offer in an Ohio city that does not provide protections for him or other LGBTQIA+ persons? What if his current job requires him to travel through Ohio from one city to another – perhaps stopping for an overnight or even just lunch in one of the cities where he does not have protections? As a mother – and as an ally to LGBTQIA+ persons everywhere – this worries me.

I believe that due to the lack of laws protecting people like my son and many of my friends, people who are misinformed feel emboldened to say things and perform acts that seek to harm LGBTQIA+ people. It is my belief that HB 369 will go a long way toward making Ohio a better place to live and work and have a business – not just for LGBTQIA+ people, but also for their families and, in fact, for everyone.

Thank you.