

House Bill 369
Proponent Testimony
House – Civil Justice Committee

Jimmie Beall

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee. My name is Jimmie Beall and I am here today with Equality Ohio to speak with you about the critical need for this very important piece of legislation, designed to bring positive change to our great state, fostering safety, hope, and pride for all people who call Ohio home. Thank you for this opportunity – the chance to share with you how much this legislation would have meant to me as a teacher in Ohio’s schools for the past 30 years, how very much it would still mean today as a resource counselor, a colleague to Ohio’s educators, a mentor to our students, and a support to many families and friends across our great state.

You see, as an educator, I have been rewarded with the richness of relationships. Every year, I have the unique opportunity to share the joy and excitement of discovery, the magical mystery that is the love of learning while opening minds to the potential and possibility of tomorrow. Instilling in people a vision for the future, as well as a sense of responsibility for others is the core of what it means to be a teacher, a profession that spans both sides of my family for more than 6 generations and the one to which I have

dedicated my life. I have served literally thousands of people across this great state.

Unfortunately, being an educator in Ohio has also brought such intense pain and heartache that I cannot even express it. As some of you may know, before being with Columbus, I worked as a teacher in London City Schools, just ½ hour west of here. When my family and I moved to London, we immediately loved the area. It was a small, close-knit community, a wonderful place where we could raise our children while being involved in local activities. I enjoyed my career and my school in London and it showed – I received stellar evaluations on my teaching performance every single year. As a result, my contract was renewed every time.

The last year I was there, I had just received my final evaluation for the school year. It was excellent, (I was thrilled!); and again I was offered a contract, in writing, and asked to be a part of the intervention team for the next year. I was thrilled – absolutely thrilled - only to be devastated two days later, when the superintendent told the principal and board members to rescind the offer because there were “questions” about my sexual orientation. I would no longer have a job!

I was shocked, overwhelmed – to be fired for being a lesbian was incomprehensible. Can that really happen? Can I be fired just for being gay even though my work was stellar and my evaluations glowing? I thought that couldn't possibly be legal! I was frantic as I called experts across the state, and then shocked to learn that in Ohio, I DO NOT have the same protections afforded everyone else. Worse yet, I had no recourse short of a long, expensive, arduous trip through the judicial system.

Being fired left me stunned and devastated. I don't need to tell you how terrified I was to have two children and suddenly have no job, no income, and no insurance for our children and me. I had no job – no options – no recourse. I had my family – my beautiful, supportive wife and two incredibly wonderful children – but no job. And that should not have been the case. I had skills, education, stellar evaluations. My job performance, my contract offer should be based on those things – not on “questions” about my sexual orientation. What did my gender or the gender of my wife have to do with my excellence as an educator? The answer of course, is nothing! Whom I love or am married to has nothing to do with how well I do my job, and therefore should have nothing to do with renewing the contract for my work. Except that in OHIO – that kind of discrimination is legal! I want you to know two very important truths today: this kind of discrimination is legal, and because it is, these situations do happen! And they will continue to happen

until it is no longer legal to discriminate. This is not right. It's not right that I was fired in 2003 and here we are 14 years later, and I could still be fired today for the very same reason. It's not right that in those 14 years, I have listened to the heartbreaking stories of others who found themselves in similar situations – fired from jobs they love in Ohio, the place they call home – just for being gay. It's not right for us, for our families, for our community or for the people of this great state that we call home. I ask you to join me and so many other people in standing for what you know is right - please do what's right for Ohio, and all who call it home. Please vote yes on House Bill 369.