

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

My partner and I have lived in Northeast Ohio for the majority of the last ten years. We met in 2010 while I was a law student and he was a medical student at Case Western Reserve University. Although we left briefly, we moved back for my partner to do his residency. We have been very fortunate not to face significant discrimination in our day-to-day lives. However, we live in a city with laws that protect us from discrimination, have employers with broad nondiscrimination policies, and attended a very welcoming university. Others are not so fortunate and I do not believe anyone should face discrimination in employment or housing based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. In Ohio, the right to these fundamental protections is based on circumstances that may be out of some people's control (e.g., where they live).

Furthermore, it is important for Ohio to portray itself as a welcoming place for everyone. Although Northeast Ohio has thriving medical and legal markets, my partner and I have reservations about living in Ohio long-term. It is important for us, and many other professionals, to live in a welcoming state. Unlike some, we are fortunate to have advanced degrees that present us with greater flexibility to choose where we want to live, but Ohio should consider this if it wants to remain competitive. Ohio's law in comparison to other states limits the ability of employers to recruit and retain employees.

For these reasons, I urge you to pass House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.