

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

To quote President Kennedy, “Now the trumpet summons us again—not as a call to bear arms... not as a call to battle, though embattled we are—but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, ‘rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation’—a struggle against the common enemies of man...”

The long twilight struggles and tribulations of the LGBT Ohioans you represent are on the cusp of resolution. In my lifetime, I have been harassed, made homeless, denied employment, forced to starve, unceremoniously sacked (along with thousands more: some even beaten and left for dead), and all of us brought to countless tears, because to some, LGBT Ohioans are second class. When asked, even those who have harmed LGBT Ohioans do not know why they hate us; yet their hatred was enough to bring many to commit murder.

In 2011, while in graduate school, I was discriminated against by my university regarding my financial aid and my landlord, and was made homeless overnight. As a result, I was starving and ill for several months.

In 2017, when I was working for a Cleveland-area nonprofit, a client began directing homophobic slurs at me because my nails were painted blue. I did not respond to this verbal abuse and immediately reported it to my supervisor. In response, my supervisor accused me of somehow provoking the client’s behavior. The next day, I was fired under my employer’s at-will policy. Although the incident involving the client was not cited as the reason for my termination, there was a clear link between the two events.

These discriminatory practices have long-term impacts on jobseekers, like me. My termination in 2017 resulted in the rescinding of a subsequent job that I had been offered a full two years later. In 2019, I was offered a better, one-year job with chances for renewal and immediate benefits. After offering me the job, they wanted to know if I had been fired from anywhere in the past five years, and when I answered honestly, the HR department demanded to receive a copy of the termination notice. I got one to them, and as a result, I was told I was a nexus to their mission, and the offer was rescinded immediately. Quite simply, they penalized me for being honest, because I got fired for being queer.

This democracy and our great state were founded in the bedrock that all are equal from a promise to love thy neighbor. The common enemy of justice is unbridled, unchecked, and uncalled-for hatred. We must recognize that if all people were angels, there would be no need for laws. As such, the rule of law must be brought to recognize that LGBT Ohioans in our families, neighborhoods, and communities must be protected from those who would see innocents suffer for being different.

I ask you as a stranger to let lady justice protect us. “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40)
I ask you as a neighbor to be my brethren.

I urge you to pass House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act. Thank you for your time and consideration.