

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

I know the importance of these laws to the LGBTQ community through my own personal experience. I lost my position of 6 years as an agronomist with an Ohio agricultural cooperative, when I told my manager I was struggling with my gender identity. I did not ask to transition at work - still, I was terminated with the explanation that "farmers are mean people." My employer did not bother to make up a reason I was let go because they didn't have to - in Ohio it is perfectly legal to fire me because I am transgender or a lesbian.

I don't seek your sympathy. I was soon hired by a national distributor of agricultural inputs, where my eventual coming out was, frankly, unremarkable. I also teach statistics online for Iowa State University.

Contrary to what coastal-elites might predict, Lima is an amazing place for me to be myself. I've been embraced by friends old and new and recruited to join Altrusa, Rotary, and community gardening. I don't know why this city is so special, but I think it is that people know each other and take each other at their word. If nothing else, their parents raised them properly not to stare at others.

I have two great jobs and a community that I love. What is my problem?

First, all of my value stay here in Ohio, supporting my community - but in choosing employment, I had to consider whether an employer is Minnesota and Iowa, which prohibit employment discrimination, or in Ohio, which does not. And so, my professional value is exported to organizations far away from here.

Second, I almost missed out on Lima. I considered leaving Ohio before coming out - I certainly would not move here as an out LGBTQ person. Laws cannot eliminate discrimination, but they advise our citizens what is ethical, and determine how we are perceived outside our community. Believe me, LGBTQ persons and their allies are watching.

I don't need you to understand or endorse my personal life. I hope, however, you understand my concern about how lack of LGBTQ protections might limit our Ohio economy. No matter our identities, we need talent to fill existing jobs, entrepreneurs to create new ones, customers to patronize small businesses, and volunteers to build our communities. Can we really afford not to welcome everyone?

Thank you for considering my testimony, and for all you do to make Ohio a better place for us all. I hope you will support HB 369 and I welcome any questions you may ask of me as a transgender woman in Ohio.