

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Meg Ryan Shockey and I am submitting this written testimony in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act. I serve as a City Councilmember of Brooklyn, OH, a community that did not have nondiscrimination rights for the LGBTQ community until Cuyahoga Council passed legislation last year. The same rights that countless Ohioans still do not have.

I was raised to follow the golden rule, which is to treat others as you would like to be treated. I was raised to not only accept the differences that others in my community portray, but to embrace them. I was raised with the understanding that discrimination of any kind is wrong. And while this is not always the America that we live in, it is the America that we should strive to be; it is the state we should become.

Because I was born a straight woman, I have certain privileges that have very real life impacts. I have not had to worry about being refused services, housing accommodations, or a job based on aspects of my character, identity, or life.

For example, while apartment and house hunting with my husband, I did not have to worry about if we would be turned away because of who I married. I do not have to think twice about allowing my husband to visit me on lunch at work or potentially fear for my job if my boss does not approve of who I married. My privilege shields me from the reality that countless residents around the State of Ohio deal with every day. It is a privilege for an aspect of life that should be a right.

Discrimination against the LGBTQ community is a human rights issue, as it can “disrupt daily behavior others take for granted and leave people feeling unsafe and unwelcome.” It is an economic issue, as according to a USA Today article, 34% of LGBT people who experienced discrimination avoided public places such as stores and restaurants, and 47% made specific decisions about where to shop. It is a health issue, in that 18% of LGBT people who experienced discrimination avoided doctor offices.

It is promising to see cities pass legislation on a municipal level, and even Cuyahoga County, which passed legislation regionally last year. However, residents cross city (and even state) lines to shop, eat, work, and more. It is so important that we as a community welcome a diverse population. While this legislation will not change views or behaviors overnight, it is the first step in welcoming the LGBT community to Ohio.

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