

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Melinda Quellhorst and I am an ordained pastor of United Church of Christ Congregational in Vermilion, Ohio.

I support House Bill 369, which is being considered today.

I have lived 46 of my 58 years in the state of Ohio. I attended elementary school and junior high school in Tiffin, Ohio. I graduated from Heidelberg University in Tiffin, Ohio, with a Bachelor of Arts and with a certificate to teach grades K – 8. I taught school in Ohio before I went on to seminary. I have attended and pastored churches in four parts of the state: Van Wert county, Mahoning county, Fairfield county, and Erie County. Most of my family lives in Ohio and has lived in Ohio since before Ohio became a state, in rural areas as well as cities.

As a local church pastor of the United Church of Christ, I have served as a rural pastor in four churches in Ohio since 1993. In each of those congregations, I have known parishioners of my congregations that struggled with discrimination because of their gender identity or their sexual orientation, both in the workplace and in the places where they have attempted to find housing. No person should have to struggle because of who they are, made by God. All residents of Ohio should be treated equally.

I believe that all people, no matter their gender, their orientation, their lifestyle, should have the basic necessities of life: a home where they feel safe, a place of work or school where they are not bullied, being able to walk into a business without fear of harassment. Treating all as we would like to be treated is what it means to live together. Discrimination against any people harms all of us.

I stand in support of loving all people, of equality for all. I listened as a person came into my study to tell me that they had just been bullied by their landlord because of their sexual orientation – they were told they were no longer welcome and had to leave. I listened, and then I helped to find them a place to live and assured them that no matter what, they are always welcome here. I believe that this bill will help to bring about equality for all, helping us to treat all people as we would like to be treated.

Thank you for listening and for your time.