

HB 369 Proponent Testimony

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Michelle Tomallo. I am a native Ohioan: born in Dayton, raised in Centerville, attended Miami University, lived in Cincinnati and Columbus early in my career and have proudly called Cleveland my home for the last 25 years.

Like the majority of Ohioans, I support House Bill 369.

I support HB 369 as a citizen, a business owner, a chamber of commerce leader, a workforce champion, and as a member of the LGBTQ community.

I am the Chief People Officer and Co-founder of FIT Technologies, a managed IT services firm of 80 staff with an annual payroll of \$5.1 million. We employ help desk and field support staff, network, server and phone engineers, project managers, procurement professionals and other staff in HR and finance. The average salary for our employees is about \$60,000.

For roles that we need, our mid-size firm competes for talent with all sorts of organizations— Fortune 500 companies, mid-sized firms and most of the 800+ members of Ohio Business Competes. For FIT, or any of these other organizations, our companies benefit in a competitive market when we increase the applicant pool. But in Ohio, we LIMIT the pool by having laws that discriminate. As a service business, our growth is almost solely dependent on recruiting capable talent.

What's more, recent national research has shown that the most sought-after talent values diversity and equality. This talent expects to work in organizations and in states that have protections for its citizens and don't legislate discrimination.

Many businesses already know the crucial importance of basic nondiscrimination protections. In fact, this is demonstrated by the 800+ businesses like FIT Technologies that have joined Ohio Business Competes, the statewide coalition of businesses in support of LGBTQ nondiscrimination protections.

Like many states in the US, we have workforce challenges. In Northeast Ohio alone, we have about 20,000 open jobs—and most likely other areas have similar woes. The Senate is aware of these needs given that the state has made massive investments in strategic workforce initiatives covering nearly every county.

Those of us in civic and business leadership, chambers of commerce, education institutions and economic development hubs expend significant resources attempting to bridge these gaps: systems changes, career days, job shadowing, internships, OTJ, recruitment events, retraining efforts.

It is disheartening at best and counter-productive at worst to know we're doing all this in a state with laws that are in direct opposition to the goals of expanding our workforce, and contradict the idea of Ohio as a "destination of choice". We lose our competitiveness against other states in the attraction and retention of employees and employers.

This battle for talent is also highlighted through my work with the LGBT Chamber of Commerce in Northeast Ohio, an affiliate of the National LGBT Chamber based in DC. I work with many stakeholders in this effort: LGBT and allied business owners, LGBT professionals, corporate partners, employee resource groups, diversity and inclusion professionals and other leaders focused on creating inclusive and diverse communities.

Nearly every week the need for workplace protections is underscored by incidents happening to Ohioans. Recently, it was by a retail manager who recounted being told that if she wants to get a promotion, she should not tell her manager she is a lesbian. Before that, it was a black man who didn't trust a fair review of his application through a state agency if he indicated he was LGBT. Last year, it was the gay couple from Illinois being recruited to Cleveland describing how it felt to be stripped of their equal rights by moving to Ohio.

It is time to do better. Let's protect all our citizens because an employer cannot protect their employees in all areas of law. It's up to Ohio's lawmakers to extend comprehensive nondiscrimination protections to the LGBTQ community in all areas of life - employment, housing and public accommodations. Let's compete. Please vote yes on House Bill 369.

Thank you for your consideration.

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