

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Nicole Pickens, and I am a pastor in the United Church of Christ. I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act.

As an ordained minister in a Christian church, one of my highest priorities is love of neighbor. I seek to live this value and to encourage others to do so as well. Love of neighbor includes caring about and seeking the well-being and protection of LGBTQ persons.

There are some who believe that Christian values mean condemning LGBTQ persons, but this is bad theology. I do not state this lightly. I have spent many years studying scripture, praying, and thoughtfully considering the best information we have about human sexual orientation and gender identity. I am convinced that allowing out-of-context Bible verses to justify oppression of LGBTQ persons is not Christian.

The highest Christian value is unconditional love. Actions and legal systems that harm or put at risk our LGBTQ neighbors are in opposition to the love demonstrated by Jesus, who accepted and loved all people, and had a special concern for those most vulnerable in society, such as LGBTQ persons are in our society today. I cannot see this issue outside of my faith perspective. Regardless of your religious affiliation or spiritual beliefs, though, surely we all can agree that fair and just treatment of every citizen is a shared value, and that when a group of citizens is at greater risk for violation of their rights it is crucial for our government to act to protect them from abuses.

I urge you, especially those of you who consider yourselves Christian, to please support the Ohio Fairness Act (HB369).

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Nicole Pickens