

To: Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee

It is still legal in Ohio to fire someone, deny them access to housing and basic goods and services simply because of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

I'm here in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act, which will make our state safer, fairer, and more competitive by fully protecting all residents, visitors, employees, investors, students, and families from legal discrimination, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

My name is Randy Webb, Life long Ohioan and resident of Olmsted Falls. I am speaking by proxy as a member, board member, or founding member for the 475 members of Dover United Church of Christ in Westlake, the 110 members of the North Coast Men's Chorus in Cleveland, the 100 members of PFLAG Cleveland, the 44 members of PFLAG Akron and the 25 members of I AM, Inclusion Affirmation Ministry in Westlake. I'm here to give voice to these many supportive organizations who could not otherwise be here today. I am also the proud father of a lesbian daughter, a Christian, and an ally to the LGBTQ community.

Almost 6 years ago, my daughter came out to us as gay. Leading up to that point, fear kept her in the closet, hiding from bullies at school, and from herself. The closet can be a dangerous place. In our case, self-harm happened in that closet. But today, she is out, strong, and proud of who she is. And her mother and I could not be more proud of the woman she is becoming.

When my daughter was around twelve years old, she went from being the boisterous, happy, funny little girl we had always known to being quiet, solemn, and shy, spending most of her free time alone. She was also afflicted with many illnesses – more than the average girl her age. Around the same time that she began to shrink away from the world, she also became sicker, causing her to miss extreme amounts of school. The doctors were stumped by her intense, chronic, debilitating, and inexplicable pains. Unknown to her mother and me, she was also self-harming during that time.

In June of 2014, my daughter came out to her family. And by that fall, she was basically healthy and enjoying life again. I am extraordinarily grateful to have my daughter back, but deeply saddened by the pain and fear she experienced.

For the LGBTQ community, fear is very real. There is a fear that because of who you are, you might be subjected to discrimination that results in the loss of your job or the denial of housing and public services. Even worse is the fear of losing your family, your community and possibly your life.

In June of 2016, my family was at the Pittsburgh Pride Parade when we learned of the Pulse Night Club tragedy in Orlando. There is no way to fully protect your LGBTQ child, friend, family member, or employee from the horrors of this world – to keep them safe at all times and to constantly watch over them. But here in Ohio, our lawmakers have the ability to make our lives a little fairer. Like other marginalized groups who are protected against discrimination in Ohio's laws, you have the opportunity to protect the rights of LGBTQ people in employment, housing, and public accommodations.

This bill has my support, and the support of the 754 people for which I am proxy. Please pass House Bill 369 and make Ohio a safer place for everyone.

Randy Webb