

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Reece Barnett, and I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act.

I am a senior at Otterbein University, I am the president of my university's chapter of Unite For Reproductive and Gender Equity (URGE) and in the only gender neutral sorority on campus. I am also a black woman.

Being in this sorority, I have met many people who have been discriminated against just for their sexual orientation and for their gender identity. My roommate and sorority sister was actually thrown out of her house and forced to pay her own way through college just for being gay. My best friend was terrified about coming out bi-sexual because she was worried that she wouldn't get a job. I've watched one of my friends come out as non-binary transgender and received a lot of hate. My uncle who is a veteran was so scared to come out that he turned to drinking, was worried he wouldn't get a job because of his sexual orientation and won't come to family events because almost everyone in the family minus my mother, my grandmother and myself would verbally abuse him. And I'm sure you all know how hard it is out there for a veteran. Basically, I've seen the people I care about and love be unable to do the things they love or be able to get a job because of their sexual orientation.

So why do I care about equality you ask? Well several reasons. I am a black woman who is a Christian and I was taught to love everyone. I don't think it is fair for someone to be discriminated against for any reason whatsoever. Why should someone be able to get fired for their sexual orientation? What harm is a gay or transgender person going to cause? None! Also, as I said earlier, I am the president of my university's chapter of URGE, and considering the E stands for Equity, I'm pretty passionate about equality as well. You all know that if this was a bill trying to make it illegal to fire a person because of their skin color, you would've voted that in before it even got to your desk.

It's sad really when people call themselves Christians and then spout hate against the LGBTQ community (not to mention the fact that they ignore the rest of the Old Testament). We're supposed to love regardless of skin color, sexual orientation and gender identity. I truly believe that it shouldn't matter, and we shouldn't discriminate. If we're going to discriminate against the LGBTQ community, then we might as well discriminate against everyone who isn't a white cisgender male. See how stupid that sounds?

I'd much rather work with someone who is LGBTQ than someone who is discriminatory toward others. I'd much rather work with someone who is LGBTQ than a rapist. Yet many would rather discriminate against the LGBTQ community than people who are truly horrible. I don't want someone who holds those views in office. I'm old enough to vote, have voted, and will continue to vote for representatives who will stand up for equality.

I live in a suburb and I go into the city often to see my grandma and let me tell you. That city (Akron) is in serious trouble. It has lost so many businesses and people under the age of 60 it can barely sustain itself. If Ohio allows people to discriminate against LGBTQ people, it will have to

explain to the people of Ohio why we no longer have good job options, and I guarantee that you will have trouble winning re-election if we lose jobs.

You may want to dismiss me, but I know you care about the state's economy. We need to protect LGBTQ folks from discrimination because it'll keep business in Ohio. We need to keep our businesses here and ensure that Ohioans keep their jobs. Businesses can't function without employees.

Please vote yes on House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Reece Barnett