

Before
The Senate Judiciary Committee
Testimony on House Bill 36

By
Joshua Hartley

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Thank you, Chair Bacon, Vice Chair Dolan, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, for giving me the opportunity today to provide testimony in opposition to House Bill 36.

My name is Joshua Hartley. I am a son, grandson, friend, advocate for equality, wedding planner and member of the LGBTQ community. I am more than my sexual orientation but that is the first and only thing that I have been discriminated for both personally and professionally.

I was raised in a Christian home my entire life. I was actively involved in the church and held various leadership roles throughout my young adulthood. When I began to question coming out publicly, I knew that the place I called my house of worship would not accept me for being LGBTQ. It took me years to come to terms with the fact that a big part of my life would have to cease in order to come out and authentically live who I was born to be. Following my public coming out, my pastor of more than 20 years held a special message the Sunday after my coming out on "Homosexuality and Jesus", where he started off his message by sharing that the message was based around my coming out since I was a longtime former member of the church. He noted that I had gained the whole world but lost my soul. That public humiliation was held in front of 900 people, broadcast live over the internet and on Facebook.

Following that, as a wedding planner, I've had the privilege of helping plan and execute ceremonies and receptions for more than 60 couples. In that time, I have been informed from ordained ministers that as long as I am the wedding planner for the couples, I am not permitted to perform any weddings (opposite-sex or same-sex) in their buildings because I am LGBTQ and support same-sex weddings. In addition, I've been informed by couples who have been denied access to use their own church's buildings for their opposite-sex wedding because I am LGBTQ and support same-sex weddings.

As both a wedding planner and a single person with future hopes of marriage, I am upset and concerned that House Bill 36 could be passed and allow for discrimination against all protected classes by religious societies who will no longer be required to keep their commercially-available building or property open to all on their wedding day. While I understand that ordained or licensed minister's have the religious freedom to determine whether to marry any

given couple, I strongly oppose the discriminatory restriction to otherwise publicly available property to members of all protected classes, on their wedding day.

I have been discriminated against by an ordained minister and religious society for being LGBTQ. I have been discriminated against by an ordained minister and religious society for being an LGBTQ wedding planner. It is my sincerest hope that in the future, should I choose to get married, I would not be discriminated against by a religious society for wanting to be married in a commercially-available building or property because my marriage does not conform to their religious beliefs simply because I am LGBTQ. And while I understand that LGBTQ Ohioans are not yet protected by Ohio's civil rights laws, I sincerely hope that interracial couples and other protected classes will not have to be subjected to similar humiliating and harmful discrimination.

In conclusion, House Bill 36 sabotages Ohio's existing civil rights laws. It allows for certain businesses, deemed "religious societies," to discriminate against anybody on their wedding day, for any reason. House Bill 36 will dampen our ongoing progress for equality. I urge the committee to reject this legislation.

Again, thank you for giving me the opportunity today to provide testimony in opposition to House Bill 36.