

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Douglas Berger, President of the Secular Humanists of Western Lake Erie, and I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act. It will increase equality for all Ohioans.

I don't know any rational person who would be against equality. Although many of us were raised to treat others how we wish to be treated, we know why we have laws and regulations to protect people who have been historically marginalized and discriminated against.

It is shocking today to think that even 50 years ago, women struggled to gain financial independence. What would disabled people from the past think of all the accommodations made today so people of all abilities can participate as equal members of the community? There is still a lot of work needed to be done to improve equality for LGBTQA people.

If some members of the committee have concerns about the financial costs of this bill, I urge you to also consider the financial costs to the state if we exclude any marginalized group from equal protection. Companies want the best talent and they don't like a business environment that encourages discrimination.

The Secular Humanists of Western Lake Erie don't believe laws or regulations should be based on the religious beliefs of the legislators. To have sound equality, we must base laws and regulations on sound scientific principles and real evidence. Not on raw, often biased emotions.

House Bill 369 doesn't force religious people to stop believing what they believe. It won't force priests to marry same-sex couples. It doesn't change the exemptions for ministers and churches. The bill would only increase the equality that most Ohioans enjoy today. LGBTQA people are people you see every day. They may even be your friends and neighbors. They deserve to be protected from discrimination by the passage of HB 369.

Aristotle once wrote: "Democracy arises out of the notion that those who are equal in any respect are equal in all respects..."

Ohio could get closer to having a real democracy by passing HB369.