

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

Let me start by saying that I am a heterosexual, cisgender female. So while you may think that this bill does not directly impact me, I believe it does. HB 369 addresses not just an LGBTQ issue, or a civil rights issue, but a human rights issue. I do not want to live in an environment where disparity is perpetuated and discrimination is tolerated. We must broaden the protections afforded under the law to those that are marginalized and vulnerable to abuse.

I work for a large company that has active employee resource groups. I have held leadership roles in the women's affinity group but also belong to and support other groups for which I don't possess the affinity. These groups include the LGBTQ, African American, Asian and groups in support of disabilities and care givers. There is a deep interconnection between the women's movement, the struggle for racial justice, the fight for LGBTQ equality, and the many other projects that have been undertaken to close opportunity gaps and promote true equity. I have found through my participation in these diverse groups, that collectively we are all just striving to achieve equality and justice – and that the success and progress of one group is often related to, if not intertwined with, the progress of another.

My employer has policies in place prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. So while my LGBTQ co-workers might be safe from discrimination at work, what about when they leave the office – to go out to dinner, to buy a house, or to order a wedding cake? No one should be denied access to a home and all that comes with that responsibility, no one should live in fear of losing their job, or be denied the right to pursue a career and be a contributing member of society – based solely on their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. Allowing any sector of our community to be discriminated against is a violation of human rights and keeps the door open for additional abuses to exist.

In addition to strengthening Ohio's existing anti-discrimination laws by adding sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression protection for LGBT people, it also extends to those who may be **perceived** as LGBT. In my younger years, I was what you would call a "tomboy." My love of and participation in athletics extended far into my 30's. I learned later that many erroneously assumed I was gay. Today, I am quite active, belong to and support the LGBT committees and groups. These include the LGBT affinity group at my work, the LGBT Committee of the Columbus Bar Association, and the PRIDE group of United Way. Based solely on this involvement, one could easily assume that I am gay. Similar assumptions are NOT made with my memberships in the Asian or African American resource groups. Quite conceivably HB 369 could directly protect me, a heterosexual, CIS-gender female who could be perceived as LGBT, from persecution and discrimination.

In summary, while LGBT Ohioans have made great strides toward equality, they still do not enjoy the same legal protections against discrimination afforded to other Ohioans – including me, a woman. Gay and transgender people, just like women, African Americans, disabled, and older people, all deserve to hold a job, have a place to live, and be served by a business or government office without facing discrimination. This is a matter of integrity and sustainability of the vital fabric of human right in our country, state and neighborhoods. All citizens should be treated fairly and live free from discrimination.

I'll close by sharing this personal story. Back in 1987, my best friend came out as lesbian. Knowing absolutely nothing about homosexuality, I really struggled with what to do. I sought advice from my

minister. He simply asked me this question: Do you want to continue to be her friend? In my heart, I truly did – and I told him this. So he advised that I simply be her friend. And I have been ever since.

On the other hand, when my mother learned that Jennie was gay, she could not accept it. She simply thought that Jennie just needed to “meet the right guy.” Flash forward to 2018. Jennie married her partner of 20+ years. I attended the wedding. When I told my mother about the ceremony after the fact, she was so happy for her! Yes, she understood that Jennie married another female. She didn’t care about that. She just was happy that Jennie was happy. My 86-year-old mother was able to open her heart and mind to the right of all people to enjoy basic human rights without discrimination. I hope our legislator can also be so enlightened.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am open to questions should you have any.