

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

For over 35 years I have served as Athletic Director at various institutions. For the past 15 years I have had the pleasure of serving in such a capacity at The Ohio State University. Having grown up in Cleveland I feel blessed to have the opportunity to one day conclude my career in a state to which I have so many personal and professional ties.

Over the course of my career, I have learned many lessons. But the one lesson that has come to represent the core of who I am is a fundamental respect for people and the indispensable value of diversity. As a leader, I am passionate about cultivating an environment in which diversity is welcomed and empowered to thrive. In my view, the best organizations thrive on such an approach to diversity.

Regardless of people's interests, personal differences, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or social and economic background, everyone has the potential to bring incredible value to our workplace, and to our society.

Indeed, it has been said before and it is worth repeating now: "Diversity is the one true thing we all have in common, (and) we should celebrate it every day."

It is time that we afford LGBTQ Ohioans the same right to equal protection under the law as everyone else. No one should have to endure discrimination in their place of work, at their home, or as they shop in their communities.

I urge you to pass House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.