

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee,

In 2019, a world with US national marriage equality, it is still legal in Ohio to fire someone, deny them access to housing and public accommodations because that individual identifies as part of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer community. If this massive gap in protections does not affect you, you may not know what it is like to sift through potential employers trying to find ones that independently provide these protections. You probably won't know what it is like to schedule a visit to view rental properties, only to be swiftly told upon your arrival that the property was magically rented an hour ago. You definitely do not know what it feels like to have people decide which public restroom you should feel most comfortable in.

These examples are just a snapshot of the reality experienced by your constituents on a daily basis. Does it sound like a safe and comfortable reality? Does it sound like they are welcome? In my opinion, the lack of current protections leaves this underserved population vulnerable and feeling unsafe... in their own state!

The economy of Ohio relies on people like myself and my partner of 12 years, married for 10yrs. We are highly qualified and skilled individuals, we are family orientated and dedicated to raising our two beautiful sons, and we identify with the core family values that weave through the fabric of our now hometown Findlay, Ohio. The fact that we are not legally protected from discrimination and in turn, not welcome, played a huge role in informing our decision to move to Ohio. However, we are the fortunate ones. We are the ones with supportive families and friends, tolerant co-workers and sympathetic employers. We essentially won 'The Ohio Gay Lottery'! By the way, that is exactly what it boils down to, a lottery! Around 40% of the homeless youth population in Ohio identify with the LGBTQ+ community (True Colors Fund). These folks did not win 'The Ohio Gay Lottery'. On the contrary, they lost hard and their state does not even provide them with basic protections to help them secure housing and employment. As human beings, don't we at least want to provide these protections for our youth?

I urgently encourage you to support House Bill 369 and to make Ohio safer, fairer and more competitive. In addition to the social implications of not having these protections, there are huge economic implications. Ohio loses top talent each day because of its outdated policies. Even the Ohio Chamber of Commerce agrees, along with Ohio Business Competes (800+ Ohio-based businesses), that updating civil rights protections to include the LGBTQ+ community is better for everyone – from consumers to employees to LGBTQ+ Ohioans seeking nothing more than equity and fairness.

Please support the Ohio Fairness Act, because the least you can do for your constituents is make the playing field of life a little bit fairer.

Many thanks,

Dr. Jasmin Bradley & Heidi Mercer
Findlay, Ohio