

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Jeniece Jones and I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act. I'm Executive Director of Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Greater Cincinnati. HOME's mission is to eliminate unlawful discrimination in housing in the Greater Cincinnati area. HOME advocates and enforces housing regulations for all protected classes and promotes stable, integrated communities. Federal fair housing laws, seeking to ensure equal access to housing, prohibit housing discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status, and disability. The Fair Housing Act, however, does not include sexual orientation or gender identity as protected classes.

HOME has received complaints from individuals who believe they have been discriminated against because their actual or perceived LGBTQ status – these cases range couples being refused housing, differing terms and conditions, quid pro quo sexual harassment and other forms of intimidation. In 2017 HOME held a 2 day summit on the emerging issues in fair housing which was attended by nearly 200 people. A key emerging issue was the needs of the LGBTQ community – the attendees included housing providers, housing consumers, research analysts and government officials. Participants spoke about how housing discrimination contaminates a person's professional, personal and civic life.

A recently commissioned study by the Department of Housing and Urban Development finds that same-sex couples experience less favorable treatment than heterosexual couples in the online rental housing market. The primary form of adverse treatment is that same-sex couples receive significantly fewer responses to e-mail inquiries about advertised units than heterosexual couples. This lack of equal access is connected to the high numbers of LGBTQ individuals, especially youth, experiencing homelessness. 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.