

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act.

My name is Ken Ditlevson, and I am providing testimony because I know that passing House Bill 369, will save lives. As a gay man, and as the Director of Kent State University's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) Student Center, I can attest to the fact that many LGBTQ+ people experience discrimination on a regular basis. Because of these challenges, LGBTQ+ individuals face higher rates of suicide attempts, drug/alcohol usage, family rejection, and homelessness. Through passing House Bill 369, these inequities will be greatly reduced.

Speaking on the issue personally, I experienced bullying at school on a weekly and daily basis through middle, and in particular in high school. I was physically and verbally attacked by multiple students, on a regular basis (i.e. punched me, kicked me, calling me a fag, telling me I should commit suicide, etc.). These experiences made me dread going to school, but I felt that the worst thing that would happen in school was the horribly mean things people would write on my school locker. Someone would write "FAG" (so that it filled the entire front of the locker) with a permanent marker. The writing would stay on my locker for 3-4 days usually (sometimes longer). However, as soon as the graffiti was removed, someone would replace the blank area and write "AIDS" (equally as large on my locker, in permanent marker). I felt beaten down, as if I had taken as much abuse as I could take, and I began to plan my own suicide. I planned my death for 3 months, and then two days prior to my scheduled suicide, a guidance counselor reached out and got me to confide in him that I was struggling with how I identified/felt. He connected me with the LGBT Center of Greater Cleveland; an intervention that saved my life. Some people are not given that chance to be connected to services and help, and some people are too fearful to reach out for help. However, having legal protections in place WILL save lives; it will raise society's expectations to treat everyone, as they would want to be treated themselves.

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