

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

Most people in Ohio and businesses, originating in the State or operating within it, support and want the protection, thereof, of said nondiscrimination policies. While about three fourths of the State support policies of nondiscrimination for the LGBT community, only 26 localities throughout the State have protections in place; and, at best, the protections are a patchwork within the State. Unfortunately, areas outside this patchwork are not covered under current law; however, House Bill 369 will provide the needed blanket protections for the LGBT community, while at the same time demonstrating our State's commitment to respect and dignity for all Ohioans and helping businesses to thrive in the State by attracting and retaining the best talent.

Without these protections, the further erosion of civil liberties will cost the State about \$64 billion annually because the human cost of about 2 million people leaving due to discrimination will force businesses to look elsewhere in the country. Ohio business and academic communities signed onto the Ohio Business Competes coalition to protect the LGBT, including transgender, community in public accommodations from the worst aspects of discrimination; and, is not a bathroom bill. House Bill 369 protects the privacy of all individuals, including transgender Ohioans, by respecting the dignity of everyone.

Most importantly, House Bill 369 protects religious freedom by keeping religious exemptions in place under current Ohio law. Businesses operating in the State should be open to everyone on the same terms regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression and Ohioans should not be turned away because of their gender identity or who they love. Protection of gay and transgender people, regardless of age or creed, is of paramount importance. No one should be removed from a business or home because of who they are or who they love.

With those thoughts in mind, I urgently and humbly request for the passage of House Bill 369. Thank you for your time and consideration; and, I will be happy to answer any questions you have.