

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

I am the choir director for Celebration Lutheran Church in Chardon. My spouse serves as a lay assistant. Although I have attended many churches along the way, I felt excluded and devalued where my race and gender are concerned. Now, my spouse and I belong to a Lutheran faith community that lives up to its name of celebrating ALL people as God's people. God's faithfulness to me as revealed in this fellowship, anchors my faith and helps me transform isolation and despair into joy and shameless inspiration.

Through the worship, scholarship, and egalitarian example of several Lutheran ministers, authors and translators, I can finally see myself, my complete self, positively included throughout the Bible, and the ministries of the church. Just like being left-handed, being LGBTQ is part of my description, but it does not define me. And, just like being left-handed was previously shamed, vilified and persecuted, being LGBTQ must be seen as a blessed part of humanity. The ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) believe that the purpose of churches is to love and serve.

We pledge to "liberty and justice for all" – ALL. Full stop. I insist that the flag waves for all of us; that I be respected as a first-class citizen. I expect equal protection under the laws of all states and territories of the USA. I demand the right to buy food, clothing, shelter, public accommodations, medical treatment, and the liberty to work, live, and love the same as anyone in this room wherever I travel.

I am also a woman of color, and transgender.

I urge you to pass House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act.

Thank you for your time and consideration.