

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 11-18-2020

Name: Rich Stratton

Are you representing: Yourself Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Brantwood Baptist Church

Position/Title: Senior Pastor

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Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? **Yes** No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): HB 369

Specific Issue: _____

Are you testifying as a: Proponent **Opponent** Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? **Yes** No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? 5 minutes

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.

Chairman Hambley, Vice-chairman Patton, ranking member Brown, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address my concerns regarding Ohio House Bill 369.

As an evangelical pastor it is perhaps expected that I would have some theological issues with this bill and its attempt to further entrench the redefining of sex and gender. I believe that the concept of binary biological gender is both a scientific fact and a biblical truth. However, that is an argument that is better reserved for open and civil discussions with those who agree or disagree, sermons within the church, and gospel conversations.

Even so, I do believe that by creating a protected class based on a fluid understanding of sexual orientation and gender identification creates as many issues as it attempts to solve.

Creating a protected class and passing blanket legislation such as that found in House Bill 369 does not adequately take into consideration the unintended and sometimes even ludicrous consequences that may result. For example as an avid backpacker I have hiked many miles along the Appalachian Trail and I never fail to shake my head in disbelief when I cover many miles of rugged terrain and arrive at a trail shelter with a privy that is equipped with handicap accessible bars. As there is no reasonable way for these facilities to be reached by someone confined to a wheel chair or a walker it is mind-blowing to see that some state legislatures did not provide for reasonable, tax dollar saving exceptions that would have led to a more pointed and meaningful attempt to protect individual liberties of citizens with physical disabilities.

Here are a few of the potential and equally head-shaking consequences I hope would be unintentional should HB 369 pass in a well-meaning but uncritical effort to protect a classification based on sexual orientation or gender identification.

First the rights of women who are victims of domestic violence would be infringed upon if shelters are defunded due to refusing service to biological males who identify as female as outlined in section 3113.36 subsection B. Women who are victims of abuse at the hands of a male cannot be expected to think through the nuances of gender identification when terrified and should not have their right to a safe place infringed upon by the right's of a newly recognized protected class.

Secondly, existing Ohio statutes cited within HB 369 seem to be in conflict with this new blanket protected class and rightly so. HB 369 section 3314.06 subsection (G) states:

That the purpose of single-gender schools that are established shall be to take advantage of the academic benefits some students realize from single-gender instruction and facilities and to offer students and parents residing in the district the option of a single-gender education.

Allowing students who "identify" as a gender that is separate from their biological gender would create disparity, confusion, and would in effect negate the afore mentioned benefits. This same classification would also open the floodgates to eliminating gender barriers in school restrooms, locker rooms, and on gender specific sports teams that are designed for the protection of students and the leveling of the playing field.

Third, adding sexual orientation and gender identification as a protected class absolutely tramples the existing rights of individuals in the area of public accommodation. I appreciate the fact that the bill recognizes current religious exemptions in Ohio law but those exemptions do not even begin to address the Pandora's box of conflicting rights this bill would open. Without recognizing the rights of service providers who have sincerely held religious beliefs this bill would open photographers, bakers, promotional good manufactures such as print shops or screen printers, wedding venues, and others with religious convictions to costly law suits. Law suits that threaten small businesses and that would quite frankly be frivolous and embarrassing to Ohio just as they have been for states like Colorado and Kentucky.

Because I believe that you and all the legislators in our great state want to thoughtfully, respectfully, and honorably protect the rights of all individuals while not sacrificing the rights of some in favor of others I respectfully ask that House Bill 369 not be advanced out of this committee.