

To: Chairman Steve Hambley, Vice Chair Tom Patton, Ranking Member Richard Brown

From: Dr. Eric S. Tober, Lead Pastor at Faith Community Church, Dublin, Ohio

Regarding: House Bill 369

Chairman Steve Hambley, Vice Chair Tom Patton, Ranking Member Richard Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today.

As a pastor I have practiced and teach our men, women, teens, and children to pray for our government leaders, to show respect and to submit to the governing laws as the early Christians did under the Roman government. I pray most every night with my wife for our President, Governor, and other elected officials. In addition to being the lead pastor for Faith Community Church in Dublin I also serve as the Central Ohio Pastor Ambassador for Citizens for Community Values. I help coordinate pastors to pray with their elected officials and to care for their personal lives. Thank you for serving the people of Ohio and listening to my testimony on the Fairness Act which I believe would be unfair to certain people in Ohio.

As a pastor for some 30 years I have had the honor of people -young and older- entrusting me with their personal struggles, including sexual identity struggles. Dysphoria, sexual abuse, rape, and adultery have been real issues in the churches I have served. I do not try to "fix" people or put them through "conversion therapy" or treat them hatefully as movies and media claim. I seek to understand and point them to Jesus who died on the cross for our sins and brings forgiveness and healing at the core of our being. The early followers of Jesus were taught ***"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ."*** (Galatians 3:28) I do not seek to force my beliefs on anyone through our government's laws. Yet, I don't want government to force on me or my fellow church members laws that hinder or forbid our closely held religious expression in everyday life. I know there are some who genuinely struggle with their sexual identity and who have no evil motives to bring harm on others. But there are others in society, waiting in the wings, who would use this bill to do harm and to silence religious expression on gender issues in Sunday services and in our everyday lives. Ohio, and particularly Columbus, is friendly to the LBGTQ community and they are being treated fairly and should be when it comes to jobs, benefits, housing and the general acceptance of our society. But their worldview should not be forced, by law, on our public schools, athletic programs, public restrooms and locker rooms, homeless shelters, and local churches.

I want to share with you a personal testimony of an experience I had in central Wisconsin where I pastored before coming to Dublin. A married couple came to our Sunday service with their children. The man was dressed as a woman and asked to use the women's restroom. I asked him to be patient and we would create a family rest room for him to use. He was not happy with that solution and continued to use the women's rest room but tried to be sensitive to who was in there. I asked why they chose our church when other churches would align more with their worldview and he said it was because they liked our children's programming and our Biblical teaching. I later learned this was only partly true.

They continued to attend for a few more weeks and then asked if he could join the women's kayak event. Our Director of Women's ministry met with her leadership team and they offered to invite him to a ladies Bible study. They believed that the women's kayak event would not be the best place for him to get involved. He was very upset by this decision. While I was on vacation, he and his wife picketed in the lobby of the church during a Sunday worship service and later that week they continued picketing at the entrance of our church. They wrote very negative and false statements on our church face book page. In my last meeting with this couple they admitted that a political group was encouraging them to "bulldoze" our church because our kind of churches were the last "holdout" for conforming to the new transgender agenda.

I understand there is a religious exemption in Bill 369 but does that only apply within the context of a Sunday morning service? As soon as our people walk out of the Sunday gathering and into our city, they are already faced with pressure to deny their religious beliefs. We believe everyone is created in the Imago Dei -the image of God. We believe the beauty of the human body in both the male and female forms reveal the image of God. We also believe the core of our identity is not found in one sexual identity but in both genders, male and female, as created by God. These are not peripheral beliefs but closely held core beliefs. We also believe we find our identity in Jesus and what he did as the substitute sacrifice for our sins on the cross. "Greater love has no one than this that someone lays down their life for our friends." We do not want anyone treated unfairly by discrimination because of issues related to gender struggles but we believe this bill does not recognize the tension with others in Ohio who would be unfairly treated and forced to comply with transgender beliefs and deny their own religious beliefs.

We believe children are a gift from God and given to a mother and father to raise to adulthood. We believe the government is charged with providing safety. I have heard the testimony of a mother whose daughter went through the gender change process to the harm of her daughter's body, mind, and spirit. (Abigail Shirer's new book *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing our Daughters*) When our three kids were in High School, I encouraged them to not date seriously because they still didn't know who they were at the core of their being? How much less does a five-year-old child, or ten-year old know who they really are at the core of their being?

I have pastored couples where physical abuse occurred. I have had to convince the wife to call the authorities and have her husband arrested. I then visited her husband in jail. I can't imagine a woman who has been physically abused going to a shelter and being forced to sleep in the same area with a man who says he identifies as a woman.

My wife and I raised three kids who are now in their thirties and happily married with children of their own. I can't imagine my granddaughters going to their high school gym class, the YMCA or a local gym and having to share a shower or bathroom with a man who says he is really a woman. I can understand that it may seem unfair that a man who believes he is a woman trapped in a man's body wants to be in what is a woman's space. Yet, how do you hold in tension his right along with the rights of others who do not want him in that space? What will protect women from men wanting to do them harm?

I do not envy the role that lawmakers have when it comes to dealing with these issues. I know that there can be much pressure placed upon you. May God give you much wisdom, discernment, and courage to be fair to all the people of Ohio and to protect our children. Thank you for listening.

