

Chairman Steve Hambley, Vice Chair Tom Patton, Ranking Member Richard Brown, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for serving the people of Ohio and for giving me the opportunity to give this testimony today.

My name is Curt Sharbaugh. I'm the Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church in New Carlisle, Ohio. I'm a husband and a father of four children, twelve-year-old twins as well as a nine-year-old and a two-year-old. But perhaps most relevant to the reason I'm here this morning is that I have a personal belief about my identity that transcends the information within my cells. And this belief is an extremely deep conviction that impacts everything else about me.

I believe that I am not a random collection of cells at the end of a long, unintended process. I believe that I am a creature made in the image of God. I believe Genesis 1:27, which says, "...God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." I believe that my being male is not the arbitrary determination of society or a decision I make about who I am. I understand my identity to be determined by the God who made me. I believe what the God in the Bible says about me—that I am created in his image and also redeemed by Jesus. My identity is a man who must obey the good news about Jesus and follow his instruction for how I live.

I am also part of a congregation of people who have joined together based on our common beliefs. Everything we do together is founded on these common beliefs. HB 369 threatens to establish definitions for discrimination that threaten our ability to affirm what we agree the Bible teaches about human identity.

We would not want to restrict those who believe something else about human identity from being able to gather and freely practice their beliefs. They should have the right to the free exercise of their beliefs just as we should. However, HB 369 favors one belief over others and is a step toward requiring everyone to live in conformity with that belief.

As I said, I have four children. As stated in sec. 4112.02 (G), if HB 369 were passed, it would be unlawful for establishments to deny the full enjoyment of facilities such as restrooms based on gender identity or expression. The impact this would have on my children in the area of public restrooms concerns me.

This bill references fairness as an aim. If it is unfair for restrooms to be regulated by one particular belief about one's gender, this bill has not corrected the problem. Instead of attempting to create a fair situation for people of differing beliefs, the bill approaches the problem by merely regulating bathrooms by the other belief. That is not a compromise; it is merely a pendulum swing. I would urge the committee to reconsider this course of action because it does not approach the issue of fairness with consideration for everyone's beliefs about personal identity. It merely forces everyone to shift our perspective from one position to the other. Instead of fighting against discrimination of one group's beliefs, the bill is actively discriminating against the beliefs of others. That is not the kind of solution to a problem one would hope for in our wonderful country, which advocates freedom at the level of our personal beliefs. I believe you can do better in addressing the problem you've perceived. This bill only addresses a problem by creating another.