

Chair Click, Vice Chair Mullins, Ranking Member Brewer, and members of the Community Revitalization Committee.

My name is Tony Katko, and I'm a pastor at Peace Lutheran Church in Gahanna.

My daughter started preschool this year, and one day as we were driving home, she said, "I have a mom and a dad. But my friend (the friend's name) has two moms. Some people have two moms and other people have a mom and a dad." I reminded her of some friends she knows at church that also have two moms, and how there are many different kinds of loving families. Later this year we talked about how some people have two dads, or step parents, or just one parent raising them.

I'm speaking out against the proposed natural family month, because as a parent and a pastor, I believe in teaching our children empathy and compassion toward their neighbors, no matter what people make up their family. I fear that this bill sends a message across our state that only one type of family is natural and is therefore more valuable, desirable, and worthy of lifting up. Instead of teaching empathy and compassion towards the diversity of families in our state, this will encourage prejudice as we teach our children to look down on families we label as "unnatural."

The creation stories in Genesis inform people of Christian and Jewish faith how to better understand our world. In this story, it says that God created light, and separated the light and dark to make day and night. Then God blessed it, and called it good. But that doesn't mean that dawn and dusk are any less blessed, or less natural than noon or midnight. Over and over in this story, God continues to bless this world in all of its diversity, including the broad spectrum of people and families that would populate it. Families who adopt, families with LGBTQIA+ parents, foster parents, single parents, step parents, other legal guardians, and families that never have children are all different expressions of natural families.

I encourage you to help teach Ohioans to better love and respect our neighbors, no matter what kind of family they come from, and not use your legislative power to label some Ohio families as more natural than others.

Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions.