

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to House Bill 68. My name is Sol Andrew Kersey, and my pronouns are they/them/theirs. I sit before you as a concerned constituent, a transgender Ohioan, a subject matter expert on queer law in Ohio, and an extraordinarily proud resident of Cincinnati.

However, I should not be sitting here before you.

Raised in the bible belt of East Tennessee, I am the product of an abusive single mother and an upbringing rooted in the Southern Baptist Convention.

I should not be sitting here before you.

Being unsuccessful at suicide multiple times in my adolescence, I lived my life surrounded and bombarded by constant reinforcements that I was, and am, inherently and irreparably flawed.

I should not be sitting here before you.

Living paycheck to paycheck, I relied on food stamps and Medicaid to make ends meet.

I should not be sitting here before you.

I came north to Ohio, to my home, Cincinnati. I acknowledge that my journey north across the mighty Ohio river is a journey and demarcation that my Black siblings' ancestors recognized as the line toward freedom. I respect and honor the history of my Black siblings and their ancestors. I respect and honor the humbling opportunity to experience crossing the Ohio in seeking my own freedom.

Arriving in Cincinnati in the fall of 2010, I found myself experiencing both poverty and homelessness within a year.

I should not be sitting here before you.

I should, in all reality, be dead.

Yet, here I am.

I am not dead. Instead, I am an individual who grew to understand and love who they are as a person – all thanks to the relationships I made in the state of Ohio. You see, when I found myself at rock bottom, when I was at the bottom of the well with no way out, the good people of Ohio extended their hands toward mine. People I now call my closest friends, people I now call my family, and the person I wound up marrying. The good people of Ohio saw me for who I am, and, instead of caring for me and loving me *despite* who I am, the good people of Ohio care for me and love me *for* who I am.

I could recount to you stories of my clients' difficulties. I could explain to you the difficulties my queer siblings have navigating the world in ways that our cisgender and heterosexual siblings take for granted. I could articulate the fear, anguish, rage, and pain my clients, my queer siblings, and myself feel as we watch our home begin to turn its back on us.

However, I want you to see *me*. I want you to look at me.

Most literally, I want you to look at me. Look me in the eyes.

I am, thanks to the good people of Ohio, an example of what an empowered and welcomed queer person can be. Thanks to the good people of Ohio, I had a wildly successful academic career. I have a master's degree in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from the University of Cincinnati. I have a JD from the University of Cincinnati College of Law.

I was, and am, empowered to be successful in my professional career as a subject-matter expert in queer competent law, serving as the Intake Coordinator for Equality Ohio. Ohio provided me with my outstanding education. Ohio provided me with a career I once only dreamed of. More importantly, however, I was, and am, empowered to be *who I am as a person*. Ohio provided me with a sense of

community, a sense of family, and a sense of stability. Ohio surrounded me with people who encouraged me to become the fullest version of myself. Ohio and her people imparted the importance of living your most authentic self at all times.

I could further emphasize my academic credentials and my critical analysis of how the queer community is affected by harmful legislation such as this. The parade of horrible outcomes has been repeatedly shared with this committee. I do not want to provide data and charts and graphs and numbers that won't be read, let alone fully understood in context.

Instead, I want you to see me. Again, look me in the eye.

This is what a happy, well-adjusted, successful, and content transgender Ohioan looks like. This is what Ohio can do for her queer citizens. The good people of Ohio have done nothing but fully welcome me in my entirety with open arms. I am a shining example of exactly how good the good people of Ohio are. I am an example to the children and the teens watching this that you can grow up, have a career, fall in love, and experience all the beauty that life has to offer – all here in Ohio.

I am here today to educate on how Ohio can continue being the open-armed and welcoming state I know we are. I am here to ensure that the children and the teens and the young adults in college watching this can see a queer adult living a full and happy life having made a home here in Ohio.

I want to underscore one point here: children, teenagers, and young adults are indeed watching this. They hear the questions you ask and the statements you make. I wish to remind you that dehumanizing language can and does have lasting negative impacts on young folks' mental health – you have a responsibility to represent your constituents, yet I am sure you can continue to do so without making children feel sub-human.

One last time, I ask each of you to take the time to look me in the eye.

I am the hopes and dreams of Ohio manifested. I was provided with the space and the friendship and the community to develop into the truest most genuine form of myself. For the sake of each and every queer youth in this beautiful state we call home: vote no on House Bill 68. I beg of you, allow Ohio to be the welcoming state she always has been. I beg of you, allow others to take my journey north across the Ohio, honoring our Black siblings and their legacy. I beg of you, allow us to *live*.

Vote no on House Bill 68. I invite you to be on the right side of history. In this very moment, there truly *is* a right and a wrong.

I invite you to educate yourselves and learn from my community. I invite you to do something very simple: *do. the. right. thing.*

Thank you for your consideration,
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