

Brandi Fasnaugh – Parent Educator, United North

Fatima Pervaiz – Youth Educator, AIDS Resource Center Ohio

My name is Brandi Fasnaugh, and I am a Parent Educator at United North in Toledo, Ohio. My last trip to Columbus was about two weeks ago, on May 13<sup>th</sup> 2009 for Lobby Day. I was here in support of the Equal Housing and Employment Act. I spent the day with Fatima Pervaiz, the Youth Educator at AIDS Resource Center Ohio, and one of her students, talking with elected officials and confirming their support on the EHEA issue. I have to say, the support was overwhelming and incredibly encouraging for our pursuit of social justice. I was hopeful that change was about to take place in Ohio.

Our last meeting for the day was held in the Riffe Building in Representative Matt Szollosi's office – and it was truly a remarkable experience. After, however, while waiting to meet up with the other members of our Equality Ohio Lobby Group, I decided to use the restroom on the third floor located near the security desk and the elevators. When I walked into the restroom I could hear two women talking to each other between the stalls about someone who had been in the bathroom when they walked in earlier. One said, "That girl looked like a boy, I can't believe she was in here. She made me feel uncomfortable." Then as the two women walked out of their respective stalls, they both glared at ME accusingly. One woman made direct eye contact with me while she said to the other, "Great – effing dykes coming in the girl's bathroom, looking like guys. Why don't they use the men's bathroom. We should have security officers effing escort them outta here." I was taken aback...and hurt – and that is the censored version. It was as though I was in an alternate universe after the lobbying support we had experienced not ten minutes before in the same building. I replied with "Way to judge someone you don't even know," and exited the bathroom, waiting for them to leave so I could finally use the bathroom.

Without consulting the members of my group, I paced the hallway of the Riffe Building with my sunglasses on to hide my embarrassment and anguish - unwilling to disclose the verbal assault that had just taken place. I felt ashamed. And although I now logically understand that I did absolutely NOTHING wrong for attempting to use a public restroom in a public building, at the

time I was humiliated and shamed – simply based on someone’s interpretation of my sexual orientation and gender identity.

Fortunately, Fatima, who spends her career illustrating the essential need for education and acceptance of ALL people – regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. – recognized something was wrong, and after much convincing, urged me to share me story with Equality Ohio and the people gathered in Columbus to rally support for the Equal Housing and Employment Act – particularly because of the many GLBTQ youth whom she mentors and supports in their daily struggles with harassment and discrimination. My shock and upset then turned to frustration – as well as a renewed sense of why the Equal Housing and Employment Act is such a fundamental component for the everyday life of ALL citizens – regardless of sexual orientation. Even in a metropolitan city, even in 2009 – one can be denied access to housing, employment and even public accommodations based simply on who they love and what they look like.

This is NOT okay. And it is time we create a new climate in Ohio. Civil rights are human rights. Let’s get it in writing.

Thank you!