

Draft Testimony I
Pastor Steve Moulton
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Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am Pastor Steven Moulton, an ordained Presbyterian minister for xxx years. I am pleased to speak to you today and seek your support for Senate Bill 305.

To me, this legislation really is very simple. It asks every Ohioan to treat others fairly, to ensure that everyone has access to employment, housing and public accommodation. The bill speaks to basic human rights, fundamental rights that most of us think were guaranteed by the U. S. Constitution. And as a member of the clergy, I believe it speaks to core values -- reminding each of us that we are called to love and respect one another.

This is not about special protections. This is about equal protection. Ohio law already bans discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, age, disability and religion. Obviously, the latter is near and dear to my heart. I am, after all, a practicing theologian within a sect whose history includes its own brushes with intolerance and bigotry. It's very possible that the resistance to Presbyterian principles exhibited in England could have migrated to the United States with our early settlers. Thankfully, our country's founders saw fit to make religious tolerance a priority and a guaranteed right of every citizen. And, just as important, thankfully Ohio lawmakers thought it important to be clear just who can count on being unfairly singled out for discriminatory acts.

Yet, the fact that we take a specific stand to prohibit certain forms of outright intolerance prompts a fundamental question: If we prohibit discrimination for all of these reasons, is it not just to also ban such behavior simply because of someone's sexual orientation or gender identity? We are all children of God. We are all Americans. That means we are all entitled to certain inalienable rights.

I live in Bowling Green, in northwestern Ohio, hardly a hotbed of far-out thinking. And yet, Bowling Green City Council is considering enacting similar legislation, following in the steps of Lucas County and the City of Toledo. Twenty (LYNNE PLEASE VERIFY NUMBER) other Ohio cities and counties have ordinances similar to this.

Further, critical large employers like Owens Illinois and the University of Toledo already prohibit discrimination based upon sexual orientation and gender identity within their workplaces. They join 432 of the nation's Fortune 500 companies in adopting such a stance.

I profess to you that these actions reflect just how mainstream it is to support this legislation.

I am not here today to debate the Biblical teachings regarding homosexuality. Nor do I believe it necessary to engage in such a discussion when referring to this legislation. This measure does not ask anyone to condone or accept another person for being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender -- any more than a prohibition against religious prejudice suggests that we somehow have to condone or accept the righteousness of someone's faith decisions.

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Standing for religious freedom does not signify that I believe in the views of Muslims or Buddhists or Taoists or Jews. All it indicates is that I have to show fairness and respect to others, regardless of my views about them or their life.

That's not radical but rather the right thing to do as an American. And, for those of us who believe in Jesus Christ, it is the loving thing to do. It is a privilege we enjoy and extend as Christians living in a free society.

Please do what's right for our state and for our people. Pass Senate Bill 305.

Thank you for your consideration and attention.