

**House Bill 176**  
**Proponent Testimony**  
**House – State Government Committee**  
**Wednesday, June 3, 2009**

***Jimmie Beall***

Good Afternoon Chairman Gerberry, Ranking Member Daniels and members of the committee. First of all, I want to thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you today about the critical need for this very important piece of legislation, legislation that will bring positive change to our great state, fostering an environment of acceptance and a sense of hope for all people who call Ohio home.

For me, today marks the fulfillment of a promise – a promise I made to my students, my children, my partner, myself, and to God – a promise written on a banner that hung above the chalkboard in my classroom - to stand for what I know is right, no matter how difficult, how scary, or costly, to stand for what is right – even if I'm standing alone.

I can tell you however, that it is great to know that today I do not have to stand alone, because we stand in the company of many incredible women and men across this state we call home, who are also committed to standing and working together to bring about equality for all people.

When I started as a teacher 20 years ago, I had no idea I would be in this place today. I wanted to be a teacher to help people, to share the joy and excitement of learning in the moment - today, while opening up the potential and possibilities of what could be - tomorrow.

I wanted to help instill in them a sense of hope for their own futures, as well as a sense of responsibility for others. Toward that end, I took up the profession of my family - my mother, grandmother, aunts, and uncles - as a teacher.

When we moved to London, we immediately loved the area. It was a small, close-knit community, a wonderful place where we could raise our children while being involved in local activities. I enjoyed my career and my school in London and it showed - I received stellar evaluations on my teaching performance every single year I was there. As a result, my contract was renewed every time.

The last year I was there, I had just received my final evaluation for the school year. It was excellent, (I was thrilled!); and again I was offered a contract, in writing, and asked to be a part of the intervention team for the next year. I was thrilled - absolutely thrilled - only to be devastated two days later, when the superintendent told the principal and board members

there were "questions" about my sexual orientation - to rescind the offer - I would NOT have a job!

I was shocked, overwhelmed - to be fired for being a lesbian was unbelievable - really unbelievable. In fact, we learned later that the superintendent had sent an email to the board members to vote against me because of the possibility I might be gay, and then told the courts that he didn't know there was anything wrong with that! While there is obviously something wrong about discrimination - he was correct - it is legal!

I was frantic as I called experts across the state, and shocked to learn that in Ohio, I do not have the same protections afforded others. And I had no recourse short of a potentially long, expensive, and unpredictable trip through the judicial system.

Being fired left me stunned and devastated. I don't need to tell you how terrified I was to have two children and suddenly have no job, no income, and no insurance for our children and me!! I had no job - no options - no recourse short of an expensive (perhaps public) legal one! I had my family - my beautiful, supportive partner and two incredibly wonderful children - but no job. And that should not have been the case! I had skills, education, stellar evaluations! My job performance, my contract offer should be based

on those things – not on “questions” about my sexual orientation!!! What did the gender of my partner have to do with my excellence as an educator???

The answer of course, is nothing! Who I love or am married to has nothing to do with how well I do my job, and therefore should have nothing to do with renewing my contract! Except that in OHIO – that kind of discrimination is legal! I want you to know two very important truths today: this is legal, and because it is - this does happen!!!

This is not right. I ask you to join me and so many other people in standing for what you know is right - please do what’s right for Ohio, and all who call it home. Please vote yes on House Bill 176.