

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Jenni Kovach and I serve as the Chief People Officer at IGS Energy. I am also the executive sponsor of our Diversity, Equity, Belonging and Inclusion efforts at IGS – which we refer to as DEBI. The goal of DEBI and – for that matter – the goal of all our employee-focused work at IGS is to create a workplace where our employees can bring their full selves to work and feel comfortable. Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for House Bill 369.

We are proudly headquartered in Dublin, Ohio and we employ more than 700 employees throughout the state. We pride ourselves on being perennially recognized as a “Best Place to Work,” and we take our role as a corporate citizen very seriously. We believe in and operate by the tenants of Conscious Capitalism – the philosophy that business and capitalism and the free market can and should be forces for good.

This commitment to our values and our employees, made it a natural decision to incorporate domestic partnership benefits for all of our eligible employees in 2015 and protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression into our equal employment opportunity policy also in 2015. We did it then because it was the right thing to do. Everybody should have the freedom to be able to put in an honest day at work, be judged on their merit, and provide for their family.

Fostering a diverse, inclusive work environment that drives innovation is one of IGS’s highest priorities. So meaningful, in fact, that it is among our company’s top strategic objectives today. The reason is simple: the energy industry is changing so rapidly that we need the best people bringing the best ideas to work every day. Research has proven time and time again that diverse perspectives lead to better ideas and higher levels of innovation.

As IGS’s Chief People Officer, I see the benefits in productivity, engagement and retention that come from LGBTQ employees feeling valued and protected by their employer. Employees everywhere in Ohio deserve the opportunity to contribute to their highest potential without fear of discrimination or punishment because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Further, Millennial and Gen Z employees especially want to work in communities and states that extend basic protections to everyone. To attract the best talent to Ohio, we must demonstrate that we are serious about extending these basic protections to everyone.

Ohio currently lacks laws that protect people based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. And while IGS and other employers have instituted protections for these employees, LGBTQ people may experience discrimination when looking for housing or in other aspects of their daily lives. This potential for discrimination plays into a current or potential employee’s decision to stay in or move to Ohio, putting our state at a competitive disadvantage.

House Bill 369 would amend the Revised Code to enact the Ohio Fairness Act to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Protecting these Ohioans allows people to have the confidence and support to achieve their full

potential, therefore sharing that potential within our wonderful state. Recognizing and embracing diversity makes all businesses stronger and more competitive. It helps our state attract and retain top talent at all skill levels. By making a clear statement establishing the expectation that everyone in our state will be treated equally, Ohio will become stronger and more attractive for workforce development.

On behalf of IGS Energy and myself, I urge you to vote in favor of House Bill 369. Thank you.