Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and the
members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Wriply Bennet and I am
testifying in support of Senate Bill 11.

I was raised and have lived most of my life here in Ohio. And as a transgender woman, I
have experienced multiple instances of explicit workplace discrimination. I’ve chosen to
share these experiences with you in the hopes that my story will demonstrate the crucial
need for statewide LGBTQ non-discrimination protections here in Ohio.

About six years ago, I started working in a local grocery store as a clerk, greeting and
assisting customers, stocking shelves, and processing transactions. Soon after my first
couple of shifts, I began receiving negative comments from my coworkers and
managers regarding my gender expression. At the time, I often wore wigs and
stereotypically feminine clothing to work, which matched my female gender identity. On
several occasions, I was reprimanded by my supervisors for the ways that I dressed. In
particular, my bosses would use a selective enforcement of the store’s dress code
policy to justify their objections to my gender presentation. I was instructed to “tone
down” my makeup and attire and to “dress more appropriate.” Ultimately, management
encouraged me to quit, explaining that the market was a “family establishment” and that
parents shouldn’t feel compelled to explain my existence to their children. Soon after
leaving, I called the store’s corporate headquarters to ask about their policies that might
restrict gender expression. I was told that no such policies existed. My supervisors had
made them up to justify their discrimination.

A year or so later, I worked for a local fast food restaurant. Although the management at
my workplace claimed to be open to my gender identity, I was often reprimanded or
even sent home early for no reason other than my appearance. When customers would
react poorly or complain about my gender expression, my supervisors responded by
sending me home early. Over time, as this continued, I lost a significant number of
hours and, ultimately, had to find work elsewhere.

Most recently, just last summer, I worked as a home health aide for a local healthcare
organization. For the most part, I enjoyed my work there. However, there was little
training and education around LGBTQ issues. Because of this, my supervisors
encouraged me to “pass,” or appear as feminine as possible, while working with the
clients we served. They explained that they didn’t want me to make the customers
uncomfortable, and that failing to present as a cisgender woman would reveal, in their
words, that I’m “actually a man.”

Workplace conditions like these make it incredibly difficult for transgender Ohioans to
reach their full potential. They degrade morale, reduce productivity, and ultimately
encourage us to take our skills and abilities elsewhere. SB11 is a step in the right
direction toward achieving fairness, equity, and inclusion in the workplace and beyond.
Please, I urge you to pass Senate Bill 11.