



**Public Testimony of Robert DeJournett
Vice President, Opportunity and Inclusion
Greater Akron Chamber**

**House Civil Justice Committee
House Bill 369**

Greetings Chairman Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown and members of the House Civil Justice Committee. My name is Robert DeJournett and I am Vice President of Opportunity and Inclusion for the Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce. On behalf of our members, I am pleased to offer our support of House Bill 369 which would create the Ohio Fairness Act. This legislation would add gender identity and sexual orientation to the list of protected classes in Ohio's Civil Rights laws and other relevant sections of the Ohio Revised Code. Working closely with the City of Akron, County of Summit and others within our surrounding communities on these issues, I feel confident that many in our region believe this legislation is long overdue.

The Greater Akron Chamber serves over 1,600 small, mid-market and large companies across Northeast Ohio. The mission of the GAC is to drive economic growth and prosperity for Greater Akron by supporting the success of the business community and acting as a convener of stakeholders on key issues facing the region. This directive led to a collaboration with the City of Akron and County of Summit focused on taking a hard and honest look at our regional economy and developing the best ways to drive opportunities for the region forward. As part of this work, the GAC regularly convenes stakeholders that drive the work behind creating more opportunity and inclusivity within the Greater Akron region, leading to the development of a regional inclusion narrative, which the Ohio Fairness Act directly aligns with.

Beyond internal efforts, the Greater Akron Chamber is a member of Ohio Business Competes, a non-partisan coalition of over 600 organizations across Ohio, including GAC members such as Summa Health, KeyBank and PNC Bank, who all support statewide employment protections for the LGBTQ community. The Greater Akron Chamber feels that implementing the Ohio Fairness Act is more than a moral imperative, but an economic one that is directly tied to the strength of Ohio's workforce. Only through creating a level playing field for everyone can businesses effectively attract and retain talent to fill jobs within Ohio's broader workforce.

The GAC and many of its members have implemented policies which already strive to provide the LGBTQ protections this legislation strives to create. Additionally, many local governments, including the City of Akron and County of Summit, as well as other large metropolitan communities including Cleveland, Cincinnati and Columbus, all have passed non-discrimination ordinances and protections for the LGBTQ community.

The economic case made by Ohio Business Competes details the economic imperative behind this legislation and supports trends being observed nationally. In light of current momentum in state legislatures across the nation, now is certainly the time to ensure that the basic civil rights of all Ohioans are protected. If we fall behind in creating a level playing field, we put Ohio at a competitive disadvantage against competing states and create a counterproductive environment for ongoing economic development activities across Ohio.

It is for these reasons that we urge the passage of House Bill 369. Thank you for your consideration.

