

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and the members of the House Civil Justice Committee, my name is Ronald B. Richard, I am the President and CEO of the Cleveland Foundation and I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act.

In my role at the Cleveland Foundation, I am honored to serve the residents of Cuyahoga, Lake and Geauga counties, and it is my primary concern each and every day to consider the ways we might improve the quality of life for *all* residents in our community – this has been the mission of our organization for more than a century. Together with our donors, the Cleveland Foundation awards more than \$100 million in grants each year, with the goal of making Greater Cleveland a community of choice and a place where people of all races, genders, sexual orientations and socioeconomic backgrounds have an equitable opportunity to succeed. We believe that if more people are empowered to realize their full potential, our entire community will benefit.

This is why the Cleveland Foundation has publicly supported actions to protect our LGBTQ+ family, friends and neighbors from discrimination. In 1983, we joined the early battle against AIDS, funding efforts to fight the disease as a major public health threat at a time when it was still widely misunderstood to be a condition that only affected the LGBTQ+ community. When the international Gay Games came to Cleveland and Akron in 2014, we seized the opportunity to express our support for the values of equality and human dignity by becoming the first-ever presenting sponsor of the games with a \$250,000 grant. In 2016, the year a gunman killed 49 people and injured 53 at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, we announced \$150,000 in grants to support LGBTQ+ citizens of Northeast Ohio and to help with the local response to that tragedy. That same year, the Cleveland Foundation signed on as proud member of the Ohio Business Competes coalition, a nonpartisan state-wide group of businesses committed to achieving LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination policies.

There is a great deal we can do – and have done – locally to achieve our goals, but there are areas in which we need statewide action and solutions, and protection against discrimination is paramount to our long-term success as a people, as a community and as a nation. The daily lives of most Ohio residents span different municipalities and counties – it is not enough for someone to be protected from unfair treatment at work but not at home – or vice versa. It is in Ohio's best interest to attract and retain innovative businesses and diverse residents and we simply cannot compete with other states if we cannot commit to protecting our residents and their families from discrimination in their workplaces, homes and public spaces. This is the reason that a growing majority of Ohio residents and businesses support protections against discrimination.

At the Cleveland Foundation, diversity and equity are among our core values. Our workplace, and our community, has benefited from generations of diverse colleagues who have committed to the mission of the Cleveland Foundation and the unique opportunity to steward inclusive philanthropy. As a leader, I can't imagine telling any of my employees, including our LGBTQ+ employees, that they are not welcome at our organization because of who they are at their

very core. Of course, there are also lost opportunities and very real costs incurred when people are discriminated against. The Center for American Progress has estimated the national cost of workplace discrimination is \$64 billion annually – this is the cost for businesses to replace more than 2 million Americans who leave their jobs because of workplace discrimination. We cannot afford to lose billions, or even millions of dollars from our GDP each year due to prejudice. Diversity adds to the bottom line – there is no greater return on investment than simply saying that all are welcome.

Between my role at the Cleveland Foundation and your role as a legislator, we share a duty to serve ALL residents of our community – even those whose lived experiences are different than our own. That’s what makes a community so unique – it is the combination of different people who have different perspectives, orientations and experiences, but who share a commitment to the place they call home. As good neighbors, there are times we need to set aside our differences and look out for one another. I urge you to act on behalf of the greater good, and in the interest of the majority of Ohioans who support protections against discrimination. I urge you to pass House Bill 369, the Ohio Fairness Act. I thank you for your time and consideration.