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**Committees**  
Transportation, Commerce & Workforce, Ranking  
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Joint Medicaid Oversight, Ranking  
Finance  
Finance – Health & Medicaid Subcommittee  
Ways & Means

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Good morning, Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown and members of the House Civil Justice Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 369/Senate Bill 11, The Ohio Fairness Act.

When legislators appear conflicted in responding to the cultural changes happening in America, it is up to the U.S. Supreme Court to intervene. The June 15, 2020 momentous U.S. Supreme Court decision on LGBTQ rights was no exception. In a 6-3 decision, written by Justice Neil Gorsuch, the court ruled that sexual orientation and gender identity & expression are protected against employment discrimination under Title VII (7) of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Prior to this decision, 27 states did not offer federal protections for gay and transgender workers, including the State of Ohio. Meaning, you could be fired from your place of employment just for being who you are, or for who you love. This landmark decision by four traditionally liberal and two conservative justices illustrates a path forward, and one that is forged by bipartisanship.

I am hopeful that this progress can be pursued in the state of Ohio as well. The fact is, without concrete laws imbedded in the Ohio Revised Code, court decisions can be reversed. Ohio is one of those 27 states without LGBTQ non-discrimination protections, and I believe that in spite of the court's decision, we still have work to do through the legislative process. The recent ruling reaffirms that passing the Ohio Fairness Act (S.B. 11/ H.B. 369) is the right thing to do and that this is the time to do it.

The Fairness Act would not only align with the U.S. Supreme Court's goal in protecting workers, but also protect Ohio families and individuals from discrimination in housing and public places. More than 230 people testified as proponents of this legislation, which has also received support from over 1,000 businesses including, but not limited to, the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, Ohio Manufacturing Association and numerous labor unions.

Recently, Crain's Cleveland stated "They (Ohio Chamber of Commerce) recognize that as the state's economy modernizes, the ability to recruit and retain talent is critical — and Ohio has fallen short in that regard. Movement to creating true equality in the workplace will help. The economy one day will be back to normal, and Ohio should make sure it's prepared to allow everyone's talent to be used to the fullest extent."

A Plain Dealer editorial from 2017 declared that Ohio should close the loophole that permits LGBTQ discrimination in Ohio—that the measure is long overdue and should be non-partisan. Just as Governor DeWine has seen fit to protect workers employed by the State of Ohio from discrimination, we should also ask Ohio employers to protect their workers as well.

Hard working Ohioans who are also members of the LGBT community contribute every day to the health and wellbeing of our state. We work, we worship, we pay our taxes, we send our children to school, we attend school, and we are civically engaged in our communities. We represent our communities on city councils, school boards, county council boards and yes we even serve as State Senators and on days such as this, introduce legislation, testify in committees, and work for the ideals of fairness and equity for all Ohio Citizens.

No one should be denied access to a home and all that comes with that responsibility, no Ohioan should live in fear of losing their job, or be denied the right to pursue a career to be a contributing member of society. All citizens should enjoy the ability to participate in one's own community without discrimination. When we say the words of our pledge of allegiance, we say "with liberty and justice for all", not some, but "for all". These civil rights assurances are the essential building blocks of our American dream and Ohio has the opportunity through this proposed legislation to provide equal treatment for all of Ohio's citizens to live, work, learn and thrive in our state.

I believe that every person deserves these fundamental protections in order to fully participate in our society free from fear, harassment, and discrimination. We have the opportunity to make this a reality with HB 369, and its companion SB 11, to communicate to the world that Ohio is open for business to all. This is not a Democrat or Republican issue. This is an issue of fairness and equity and a bright future for the people of Ohio, all the people of Ohio.

I leave you with the wise words of Coretta Scott King:

"We have work to do in our common struggle against bigotry and discrimination. I say "common struggle" because I believe very strongly that all forms of bigotry and discrimination are equally wrong and should be opposed by right-thinking Americans everywhere. Freedom from discrimination based on sexual orientation is surely a fundamental human right in any great democracy, as much as freedom from racial, religious, gender, or ethnic discrimination."

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have at this time.