

Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Vania Sherepita, and I support the legislation, SB 11, being considered.

I have lived all but five of my 55 years in Ohio, and I am currently a resident of Lakewood. I graduated from Brunswick High School, and attended college Tri-C and Cleveland State University. I work as a Business Resources Consultant for Sysco Cleveland, helping Ohio restaurant owners to be successful and profitable business owners. I enjoy fishing in the Cleveland Metroparks, and hiking in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. I am a lover of local live music, a patron of Playhouse Square, a supporter of local public radio, and a member of the Cleveland Museum of Art. I have two amazing children, one a student at Kent State University, and the other a student at Harding Middle School in Lakewood.

I am also a transgender woman. I was assigned male at birth; and I now live a productive and fulfilling life as a woman.

Being transgender is not that which defines me; the list of activities above does a much better job.

Being transgender is not a choice; but, everything listed above is.

Living in Ohio is also a choice, and I realize daily just how grateful I am that I have made that choice. Yet, I am saddened and frightened by the fact that Ohio does not have non-discrimination protections in place for its LGBT residents. Whenever I share this fact with friends, family, and co-workers who are not members of the LGBT community, they are surprised that it is still legal to discriminate against someone simply for who they are in Ohio in 2019. Ignorance of this lack of protections creates a false sense of security for those not directly affected.

So, I made it a point to tell everyone I knew about the lack of legal protections for this marginalized group of Ohio's citizens. Then I also started telling everyone I didn't know as well. While knocking on doors as a volunteer to raise awareness of this situation, I found most people I spoke with were, again, surprised that there were no legal protections already in place. An overwhelming majority of all I spoke with are in support of some sort of legal protections.

Thank you for considering SB 11. I personally have been very lucky with friends, family, and an employer that allow me to enjoy a happy and prosperous life as a transgender member of our community. However, I know many who are not as lucky. SB 11 would put into place a legal equality that would validate the lived equality that all Ohioans deserve.