

Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is David Long-Higgins and I am submitting this testimony in support of Senate Bill 11, the Ohio Fairness Act.

I write as a Christian minister of the United Church of Christ and as the Transitional Conference Minister of the Ohio Conference, United Church of Christ, in which there are 330 congregations statewide. I believe that the way of Jesus Christ is a way of loving inclusion for all people. As such, LGBTQ persons who have often been hurt by the church and by society (sadly often in the name of Jesus) deserve protection to prevent harm and to assure that their gifts may be freely encouraged to build up the communities in which they live and the state which we share.

My understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we are called to stand with those who have been on the margins of society. All of God's children are beloved with no exceptions. Love of God and love of neighbor demand that this love be extended in ways that nurture the full humanity of every member of the community with no exceptions.

In addition to having a theological conviction about non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ folks, until his death, I had a member of my family who was gay. For me, the support of such protections is a way of honoring one who worked tirelessly for his entire life to build up the community at large where he lived.

The local congregation of which I am a member is also fully supportive of the inclusion of LGBTQ folks in our faith community and desires that no one be diminished on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

As a person of faith and a leader in my denomination, I urge the passage of LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination protections for Ohio.

I urge you to pass Senate Bill 11, the Ohio Fairness Act.

Thank you for your time and consideration.