



State Senator Nickie J. Antonio
District 23

Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
December 7, 2022
Sponsor Testimony SB 119

Good morning, Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 119, the Ohio Fairness Act.

The most recent version of the Fairness Act is modeled after the 2020 Supreme Court decision, *Bostock v. Clayton County*. It clarifies that sex discrimination includes discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, without creating new protected classes or infringing on religious liberty, as it upholds all existing religious exemptions under the Ohio Civil Rights Law. It is a fair proposal that will simply give people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender the same freedom to work, the same freedom to live where they choose and the same full, equal participation in society just as anyone else in Ohio. It has been over 50 years since we updated the Civil Rights Act. For the estimated 400,000 LGBT Ohioans, fairness is long overdue.

Twenty-one of America's 50 states currently protect people from discrimination based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity¹. Additionally, 34 municipalities in Ohio and Cuyahoga County have also passed full non-discrimination ordinances².

¹ <https://freedomforallamericans.org/states/>

² <https://equalityohio.org/our-work/local/municipal-map/>

Today in our state, a same-sex couple could be married on a Saturday, post their wedding photos on Sunday and be evicted from their apartment on Monday — based solely on who they are and/or whom they love. I do not believe this is compatible with the values of fairness that Ohioans hold dear.

It is important to note that on his first night as the newly elected governor, Mike DeWine signed an executive order outlining an anti-discrimination policy for state government employees that included sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. The governor has made protections for LGBT Ohioans a priority, explaining that it will help attract and retain the best employees¹.

More than 1,000 businesses have joined Ohio Business Competes, a nonpartisan coalition of Ohio businesses that support non-discrimination policies inclusive of LGBTQ Ohioans². Some of these business leaders include Procter & Gamble Company, OhioHealth, American Electric Power, the Ohio State University, KeyBank, General Electric, United Way, Huntington and AT&T. It is also important to note that the Ohio Chamber of Commerce supported this pro-business, non-discrimination legislation in the 133rd General Assembly, and offered proponent testimony in committee. They continue to support this effort today.

No one should be denied access to a home or live in fear of losing their job, or be denied the right to pursue a career simply because of whom they love. 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. Ohio has the opportunity through this proposed legislation to provide equal treatment for all of our residents to live, work, learn and thrive in our state. With the Ohio Fairness Act, we can send a message that Ohio is open to all for business in the 21st century.

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

¹ <https://www.hannah.com/DesktopDefaultPublic.aspx?type=hns&id=mfnHrmODBQo%3d&u=MtvLsMddBIU%3d>

² <https://ohiobusinesscompetes.org/members/>