

House Bill 467 – Proponent Testimony

To: House Government Oversight Committee

From: Ainslee Johnson-Brown, Ohio Policy & Movement Building Director, Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity

Date: May 13, 2024

Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 467. My name is Ainslee Johnson-Brown, and I serve as the Ohio Policy and Movement Building Director at the Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity (URGE).

As an organization, URGE advocates for equity and equality for our most marginalized Ohioans—including the LGBTQ+ community, immigrants, and survivors of domestic and sexual violence. At URGE, we believe that every person has the right to live a safe and dignified life and pour our resources into developing young leaders in Ohio for today and tomorrow. It is from that perspective that I urge the members of the House Government Oversight Committee to modernize the Declaration of Candidacy form requirements by moving House Bill 467 forward to amend Ohio Revised Code 3515.271.

As it is currently applied, R.C. 3515.271 allows exemptions for change of name by marriage within the last five years. The presumption behind this exception is that the change of name is validated by records and proceedings under the purview of the county courts. House Bill 467 applies the existing exemption to all name changes that occur under the same purview.

You will undoubtedly hear testimony about the devastating impact that the current Declaration of Candidacy requirements have on those in the transgender community who wish to seek elected office. I would also like to highlight the impact of the requirement on naturalized immigrants. In 2023, Ari Gold was denied the opportunity to seek the mayoral office in Marietta, Ohio despite changing his name as part of the process of becoming a United States citizen three years prior. Mr. Gold had established a reputation as a relator and restaurateur in his community. Mr. Gold submitted his Declaration of Candidacy form without comment from the county board of elections but was summarily denied without reconsideration from candidacy. If House Bill 467 were enacted into law, the naturalization documents that grant Mr. Gold citizenship in the United States would be sufficient to fulfill the amended disclosure requirements.

Furthermore, House Bill 467 adds protections to survivors of domestic violence who legally change their names in fear of their attackers. Currently, Ohio courts allow sealed name changes for victims

of crime. While these name changes may not be subject to public announcement, the level of scrutiny performed by the court in examining the person's history is the same.

Passing House Bill 467 is a necessary step in providing clarity, reducing redundancy, and making public service safely assessable for all qualified Ohioans. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am hopeful that, as elected representatives, you will uphold the values of fairness, equality, and compassion that are fundamental to our democracy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AJB', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ainslee Johnson-Brown
Ohio Policy and Movement Building Director
Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity