



State Senator Nickie J. Antonio
District 23

Senate Government Oversight Committee

November 13, 2024

Sponsor Testimony SB 132

Good morning, Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 132, legislation modeled after the 2020 Supreme Court decision, *Bostock v. Clayton County*. This legislation would clarify that sex discrimination includes discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.

It clarifies that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects employees against discrimination merely for being from the LGBT community. This legislation will not create new protected classes or infringe on religious liberty, as it upholds all existing religious exemptions under the current Ohio Civil Rights Law. It is a fair proposal that will simply give people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender the same freedom and access to jobs, housing, and services as anyone else in Ohio. It has been over 50 years since we updated the Civil Rights Act. For the estimated *half a million* LGBT Ohioans, fairness is long overdue.

Many employers across the country and here in Ohio have extended nondiscrimination policies to cover people identifying as LGBT. Intel and Google are among those employers with such inclusive policies and will soon seek to add hundreds of employees to their numbers in Ohio. Yet hundreds of thousands of Ohioans remain unprotected. Ohio is one of 28 states without clear, inclusive, non-discrimination protections for members of the LGBT community.¹

More than 1,350 businesses have joined Ohio Business Competes, a nonpartisan coalition of Ohio businesses that support nondiscrimination policies that are inclusive of LGBT Ohioans.² Some of these businesses include the Procter & Gamble Company,

¹ https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/non_discrimination_laws

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

OhioHealth, AEP (American Electric Power), KeyBank, General Electric, United Way, Huntington, and AT&T. Of note, the Ohio Chamber of Commerce and the Ohio Manufacturing Association have supported this pro-business, non-discrimination legislation since the 132nd General Assembly.

The inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are the fundamental building blocks of our American democracy. Ohio has the opportunity through this proposed legislation to provide equal and fair treatment for all of Ohio's citizens. The Ohio Fairness Act would send a message that the LGBT community is welcome, and that Ohio is open for business (large and small), tourism, and travelers while also recruiting the best and the brightest workers. Treating LGBT people fairly could create long-term economic benefits for our state.

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