

Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Amanda Leu and I submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 11.

I have been a resident of Ohio since enrolling at Kent State in 2008 to obtain my Bachelor's and Master's in Higher Education and Student Personnel. Today, I serve as Diversity Director in the College of Communication and Information at Kent State University.

Growing up, I experienced harassment and discrimination because of my sexual orientation and gender identity. Fortunately, I joined a much more welcoming and inclusive community when I moved to Ohio to attend Kent State, which has long been a safe place for LGBTQ+ folks. While deciding where to go to school, I would have never considered Ohio as an option if it weren't for Kent State. I didn't want to live in a state that didn't afford legal protections to its LGBTQ+ community.

I had a wonderful experience at Kent State and decided to settle down in Kent long term. I wouldn't dare branch out and relocate elsewhere in Ohio for fear that I wouldn't be accepted and protected like I was at the university. Upon finishing my master's degree at Kent State, I decided to give back to the university that kept me safe and loved for so many years by becoming a full-time employee. Kent State has specific non-discrimination policies that protect their LGBTQ+ employees. And because our city has LGBTQ+ protections, I've chosen to make a family here. Nonetheless, I find it deeply unsettling to know that the majority of LGBTQ+ Ohioans are not afforded these same protections.

I was very fortunate to find a safe haven in our little northeast corner of Ohio. However, I know that many people within the LGBTQ+ community are not so lucky. I have gone out of my way to keep my family and myself safe from discrimination. I am certain that many students, parents, families, community members, and others with ties to the LGBTQ+ community intentionally avoid our great State out of fear that they will not be able to maintain stable employment and a steady livelihood.

No Ohioan should have to go to work every day fearing that they might be fired simply for being who they are. Ohio needs to be a place where the caliber of one's work and one's commitment to his or her place of employment serves as the sole measure of professional success, regardless of who you are or how you identify. Ohio needs to be a place where employers can attract and retain the best employees across the spectrum of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

Discrimination does happen here in Ohio, and we are better than that. I urge you to consider passing SB11.