

Testimony on SB 11

Chairman Ecklund, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony in support of SB 11. I am writing today as a resident of southeastern Ohio and a former member of the Ohio House, to share my support for expanding Ohio's protections under non-discrimination laws.

Our nation was founded on the basic idea of opportunity and fairness. Citizens believe in equal rights, and businesses do, too. Legislation to extend basic legal protections to all citizens is essential to clarify Ohio's intention to uphold these basic principles, as well as to maintain a competitive business climate.

There have been times in our shared history when discrimination was viewed as acceptable. Housing, access to public accommodation and businesses, and hiring based on ethnicity was a common practice. Today, the vast majority look back at historic photographs that say, "no Irish," or "whites only," with disbelief and a sense of progress. It's good to be able to think that we, as a nation, have made progress, and that we uphold our values of a level playing field and a fair chance in life. The movement to stop the historic isolation of individuals with disabilities, and the promotion of all types of access to public accommodation has been slow and steady. But the fact that we have accessible doorways and bathrooms in businesses and public buildings stands as testament to the fact that we know the value of all people. It has taken time.

These improvements did not happen spontaneously. There were costs, and there was resistance. People had to stand up for themselves, and for each other all along the way. So it is with this simple, common-sense improvement in Ohio's legal protections. Sometimes, government must play a role in codifying what we know is right. People deserve to have basic rights under the law in Ohio, as in other states. In hiring, housing, and public accommodation, we should stand on the right side of history and play our part in extending legal protection under non-discrimination laws on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

I urge you to vote for SB 11 and recommend its passage by the Ohio General Assembly. Thank you for your consideration and your public service. I would be happy to discuss this further with any member of the committee at your convenience.

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