

Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Jack Miner and I am submitting this testimony in support of Senate Bill 11, the Ohio Fairness Act. I serve as chair of the Worthington, Ohio, Community Relations Commission. My organization is appointed to support our city council and city government on issues related to community engagement and equality.

For the past year, we have been working to bring a local non-discrimination ordinance to Worthington. That ordinance, inclusive of coverage for the LGBTQ community, is up for a full vote of council on May 20<sup>th</sup> and is anticipated to pass. At the time of the hearing for the Ohio Fairness Act, Worthington will be the latest community, and the 23<sup>rd</sup> overall to offer protections for LGBTQ community members.

Worthington has a long history of inclusivity. As we began working with the Worthington community on the topic of a non-discrimination ordinance it was clear from the start that the project would be an education effort rather than an advocacy effort. In all of the early conversations, one of the first statements was "I am amazed Worthington doesn't have this already." and that was quickly followed by "Doesn't Ohio have this?" We found the community was supportive but that we were often fighting misinformation about whether the protections already exist. To further complicate matters, in many cases, even those who were supportive asked "Why Worthington?" To be honest, I asked that same question myself..."Why is this a Worthington issue to address, why wouldn't Ohio step up to provide these protections?" I am not sure I have that answer to this day and that is why I am sharing this testimony.

Let me start with "Why Worthington" or more specifically, why Worthington chose at this time to address this issue and step forward to provide protections. In many communities, non-discrimination ordinances have risen out of community discord or out of specific incidents in which community members were not treated respectfully or equally. In Worthington, this wasn't the case. Rather, as we did an environmental scan, the lack of protections and the lack of ordinance was seen as an area we wanted to proactively improve. Worthington chose to make this about the values of our community. This wasn't solving an incident, this wasn't quantifying whether discrimination had happened in the past, this was about stating positively and with resolve what type of community we aspire to be. We want to be a place that does not discriminate and that ensures that those within the community also do not discriminate. We made that statement about a series of protected classes but specifically included the LGBTQ community because they were excluded from many state and federal protections. As our city made this affirmation of our values, our faith community, business community and citizens stepped forward to affirm their belief in those values and to support the non-discrimination ordinance.

While this all seems very positive and like a great community story, it all comes back to "Why Worthington?" If these are our values, aren't they also Ohio's values? If these are the values of our faith community and our business community, aren't they also the values of those same communities throughout Ohio? Should the affirmation of those values stop at the Worthington border?

As you consider those questions, I will share my reflections to Worthington's City Council as we embarked on our journey. I raised my family in Worthington, I have lived there for decades and know many of the merchants in the city. When my husband and I married in 2016, we didn't hold the ceremony in Worthington, we didn't hold the reception in Worthington, or use any of the Worthington businesses for anything related to the day. It wasn't a statement, it was an abundance of caution. I didn't know if I would be discriminated against. I didn't know if I would be turned away or shunned. For me, it was easier to go to a community where I knew my business would be welcomed and my day would be celebrated. I recognize that I come from a place of privilege. For many, in Worthington and Ohio, this is life or death...it is removing the barrier for them to work, live, be safe, and raise a family. For me, it is about a sense of being. I chose to fight for this in Worthington because I knew I belonged there, I felt that the community supported that, and the ordinance ensured that others would never have to have that doubt in the future. The legislation before you today has that same possibility...for some of you, think about this as being an opportunity to save a life or save someone's livelihood. For others of you, though, think about this as an opportunity to share Ohio's values and to say that in Ohio all people matter and have rights. I urge you to pass Senate Bill 11, the Ohio Fairness Act. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.