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Testimony in support of Senate Bill 11, The Ohio Fairness Act

My name is Jean Hodge and I am a lifelong resident of Ohio. I am in support of S.B.11 for many reasons, but most importantly, because I strongly, morally and ethically believe each person in our state should be treated equitably regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. If we treated each other with the same respect and kindness that we wish to be treated, there would be no need for laws like this. Unfortunately, that is not the case. People within the LGBTQ community can lose their job based on who they love or how they identify. They can lose or have difficulty obtaining housing – a basic human need, and be denied access to a toilet because someone doesn't see them for who they are. If you don't know or love someone in the LGBTQ community today, I guarantee you at some point in your life you will. If you can't agree to pass this law due to your beliefs, fears or lack of knowledge; perhaps you can consider voting for it strictly for vital economic reasons.

Most Ohio businesses, universities and Fortune 1000 Companies support protections from discrimination against a person based on sexual orientation or gender identity. In fact, many companies headquartered in Ohio value equity and protections for LGBTQ employees as evidenced in the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) 2019 Corporate Equality Index that measures companies based on workplace protections, domestic partner and same sex marriage benefits, transgender inclusive healthcare and public engagement within the LGBTQ community.

A number of these Fortune 1000 companies like Kroger (Cincinnati), Procter & Gamble (Cincinnati), Macy's (Cincinnati), 5/3 Bank (Cincinnati), Abercrombie and Fitch (Columbus), Nationwide (Columbus), L Brands (Columbus), Owens Corning (Toledo), KeyBank (Cleveland) and Huntington Bank (Columbus) to name a few, are headquartered in Ohio, employing hundreds of thousands of Ohioans who pay taxes, and whose management believes in fairness and non-discrimination, as demonstrated by their **PERFECT** score on the 2019 HRC Corporate Equality Index. The Kroger Co. score just increased to perfect in 2019, indicating that they actively changed priorities to meet these standards.

How will Ohio keep these headquarters if they can't attract talented and educated people to work for them? It would be easy for any of these companies to relocate to an LGBTQ friendly state like New York and frankly, for Macy's it may make more sense for them to do so. (At Macy's headquarters, Springdale offices and Mason customer service center, over 3000 people are employed; hence, a large loss of jobs if they decided to relocate.) Procter & Gamble has initiated a program called GABLE – Gay, Ally, Bisexual, Lesbian and Transgender Employees. They are dedicated to fostering an inclusive, supportive global network that enables ALL people to contribute to their fullest potential and to bring their whole self to work each day. Both Procter & Gamble and Macy's have signed on as supporters of the federal Equality Act as part of the Business Coalition for Equality. Clearly, anti-discrimination is a priority. The responsibility to pass this law is yours in order to keep these employers and skilled workers in our state. How will Ohio attract new business and recruit technology, consultancy and entertainment industry companies and employees if we don't protect the LGBTQ community?

I learned through the Ohio Department of Education that most public Ohio middle and high schools support protections for their LGBTQ students as evidenced through at least two programs that are provided: Know! How to Create Safe and Welcoming Schools for LGBTQ Students and Safe Space Kit in every Ohio School from GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network). The next generation of Ohioans are being taught that it's not ok to discriminate against their classmates based on sexual orientation or gender identity, but to treat them with respect and dignity. Furthermore; there are consequences for students who treat LGBTQ students unfairly or harshly – up to suspension and expulsion. It would be beneficial for our state lawmakers to follow what our schools are doing – protect the LGBTQ person from discrimination and provide consequences for employers, housing authorities and others who don't follow the law. It would also benefit Ohio to keep and attract young people to our state, instead of fleeing to one that is welcoming to LGBTQ people. By voting for this bill, you can help ensure that the next generation will want to stay in Ohio or to relocate here for opportunity, acceptance and freedom.

Lastly, I have a transgender daughter who endured an all-boys, Catholic high school education, before coming out to us her sophomore year in college. She is intelligent and motivated to pursue higher education, possibly a doctoral program, and it would be a victory if she could consider a program in Ohio. As long as our laws remain as they are, she will likely move to a LGBTQ – friendly state where she can be safe to live her life fully. And, that would be Ohio's loss.