

Dear Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Justin DeLong and I am submitting this testimony in support of Senate Bill 11, the Ohio Fairness Act.

I am writing to you to express my support for the Ohio Fairness Act. I serve as a Pastor in Community of Christ and I am part of the LGBTQ+ community. I know what it is like to feel excluded and ashamed for being the person that I was born to be. So many people go through life feeling like they are second class citizens. They are told by society that they do not belong and they often find themselves facing discrimination in the workplace; with housing opportunities and in public spaces. It is our duty to protect those in our community who are marginalized and oppressed. The LGBTQ+ community deserves to be treated with dignity, respect and equal protection under the law. Each person deserves to live their life as their authentic self without fear of discrimination for simply living as who they are. We must take a stand for those that some are trying to down and condemn.

In my experience as a pastor, I hear the stories of those who have been disowned and condemned by family and their faith community. I have experienced similar circumstances in my own life. It is a very dark and depressing state to be forced into. We must learn to see the value and worth of all people and understand that we are in this life together and we each deserve the opportunity to live life to our full potential, no matter who we are or who we love. May we learn to love and see the value in our neighbor and follow the example that Jesus' taught us.

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.

Sincerely,

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