

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

As a transgender woman, author and advocate for transgender communities nationwide, I am able to speak first-hand on why this legislation is vital to the State of Ohio.

Those who are transgender and living in Ohio do so unprotected laws that afford protections to others. This exclusiveness is unfair and unjust. We are citizens of Ohio; we are citizens of America. No different than any other. Yet we struggle daily to live, to survive, in Ohio, because we do not have statewide protections in employment, in healthcare, or from discrimination of any type, including the use of public restrooms.

In the villages, towns and cities in Ohio who do support equal rights for all, the LGBTQ communities thrive, along with rest of those citizens. For example, Toledo recently ranked near the bottom of the list of cities in Ohio in terms of inclusion of the LGBTQ community. A few short years later, we ranked at the top of the list. Currently, we are ranked number 4 nationwide among communities that LGBTQ people choose to retire to. It is all due to having protections for all, including LGBTQ people, at the local level.

When it comes to changing a person's name and gender marker, by court order, the State of Ohio is one of the three remaining states that still discriminate against transgender people by refusing to change the gender marker on their birth certificates. This makes it difficult to prove who they are, legally, by court order for identification. Even the State of Ohio sees me as female on my driver license. However, my birth certificate still says "male". As a result, I cannot visit anywhere outside of the country without being in fear that I will be denied reentry on my return. While this policy would not be impacted by the Ohio Fairness Act, it is an additional example of the many challenges experienced by transgender Ohioans.

The Ohio Fairness Act would provide LGBTQ Ohioans with protection from discrimination. It would bring Ohio in line with other states that have chosen to protect their LGBTQ residents. This legislation improves the lives of thousands of Ohio Citizens. Passing it harms no one in Ohio.

I strongly urge the Ohio Legislature to support these protections by passing the Ohio Fairness Act.

Thank you for your time and consideration