

May 22, 2019

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

First, some context about me. I'm openly gay. I was born and raised in Northeast Ohio, in a rural community in Lorain County. I come from a blue-collar, Christian family. I went to law school at Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, and I've been practicing law for 20+ years. I work for a Fortune 100 company, where I've been a leader in our diversity and inclusion program, so I'm well-versed in LGBTQ issues in the workplace. Finally, I'm a Board member for Equality Ohio, so I'm also well-versed on the impact of the type of legislation that's before the Senate Judiciary Committee. My history gives me an interesting perspective on this issue.

I anticipate that you will hear testimony from people associated with religious organizations asking that you not move the Ohio Fairness Act forward. They believe the Bill would interfere with their religious freedom. Legally, that's not accurate because the religious exemptions in the Bill match those at the state and federal level.

I support this legislation because it would create protections in employment, housing, and public accommodations for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Legally, these protections are necessary for LGBTQ people to protect us from discrimination.

Balancing the interest of diverse constituents is a challenge. On the one hand, you have devoutly religious people who feel that, based on their religious beliefs, it should be legal for them to discriminate based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. On the other hand, you have members of the LGBTQ community whose lived experience of discrimination tells a different story. A story of being fired from your job for coming out as transgender. A story of being refused service in a restaurant because you look gay. A story of being evicted from an apartment because you're gay. Ask yourself this: if those things happened to you and you had no legal recourse, how would you feel?

While we've made strides as a society, discrimination against LGBTQ people is still shockingly and unacceptably common. The opponents to this Bill are, in essence, asking to affirm their right to discriminate against LGBTQ people based on the cloak of religious freedom. Discrimination, however cloaked, has no place in our community. I urge you to pass Senate Bill 11, the Ohio Fairness Act. In doing so, you will let it be known that all people are welcome in Ohio and can live their lives here free from the fear of discrimination.

Sincerely,

Kellie Rubesne