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Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Laura Robertson-Boyd, and I am submitting this testimony in support of Senate Bill 11, the Ohio Fairness Act.

In 2015, my 14-year-old son was a Life Scout with the Boy Scouts of America, pursuing his Eagle Scout rank. As part of his "Citizenship in the Community" badge, he decided to attend several City Council meetings in our community of Bexley. He chose to attend the public hearings on ordinance 12-15: "Banning the discrimination in the City of Bexley, Ohio based upon the race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, age, disability, familial status, or military status."

My son felt so strongly about this issue that he decided to address City Council and speak up for the rights of all people to be treated equally. After all, this is a fundamental tenet of the Boy Scout oath: "to help other people at all times...." The City Council members and the Mayor were so impressed with his courage to speak out that when he earned his Eagle Scout rank several years later, the Mayor wrote a proclamation to honor his achievement and presented it to him at his Court of Honor ceremony.

Last year, my son came out to our family as transgender. The past year has been a journey of learning and understanding for all of us. I have learned the difference between sexual orientation and gender identification. I have learned that in the development of a fetus, genitalia are formed at a different time than the hormones that affect gender identity, and they don't always match. I have learned that gender identity is a spectrum, and all of us fall somewhere on the spectrum that is neither 100% male nor 100% female.

What I have not had to learn is the fundamental principal that goes back to our earliest teachings in life: treat other people as you want to be treated. Every single human being deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

What I have learned is that people who identify as LGBTQ and transgender are at a greater risk of experiencing discrimination and harassment, and current state laws provide no protections for them.

Governor Mike DeWine, immediately upon being sworn in as Ohio's new Governor, signed an executive order that protects State of Ohio employees from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. It is now time for Ohio to extend this protection to all citizens, not just employees of the State.

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,

Laura Robertson-Boyd