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*Creating Inclusive
Communities
Of Opportunity*

Senate Judiciary Committee
Senate Building
1 Capitol Square
Ground Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

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

We are writing to convey our support for the proposed Ohio Fairness Act as a meaningful step towards ensuring LGBTQ people have equal access to housing. This legislation will help to remove barriers many people face when trying to find a safe, stable place to live, especially for those with critical housing needs who reside in shelters or other supportive housing.

The Fair Housing Center in Toledo, OH is a private, nonprofit civil rights agency dedicated to the elimination of housing discrimination, the promotion of housing choice, and the creation of inclusive communities of opportunity. Over the last 44 years, The Fair Housing Center has investigated 12,000 complaints, recovered more than \$33 million in damages for victims and neighborhood reinvestment, and set national legal precedents that have expanded opportunities across the country.

The federal Fair Housing Act protects the right of everyone to freely choose where they live, regardless of their race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, or familial status. Many local jurisdictions around the state also recognize sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes, but a lack of both proper enforcement and ubiquitous protection leaves many LGBTQ members of our community vulnerable to housing discrimination. Just as Ohio recognized military status as an additional protected class in 2008, the Ohio Fairness Act presents a further opportunity for Ohio to be a leader in expanding access to housing opportunities.

Concerns have been raised regarding the impact of this proposed legislation on shelters and other similar emergency or supportive housing. As a community, LGBTQ people are at a heightened risk for homelessness, discrimination, and sexual violence and exploitation. Turning someone away simply because of their sexual orientation or gender identity means denying critical resources to those who need it most, thereby exacerbating housing instability. The Ohio Fairness Act would not impede a shelter from enforcing their standard rules for occupancy that dictate resident behavior, which means they could continue to maintain a safe, stable environment for everyone who resides there.

No one should be denied a home or a place to stay because of who they are. Housing is a basic right, forming the foundation for security that enables people to thrive. We hope that you will support the Ohio Fairness Act, sending the message that the door to opportunity is open to all who call Ohio home.

Respectfully,

Marie M. Flannery
President and CEO