

May 10, 2019

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

My name is Megan Kilgore and I am submitting this testimony in support of Senate Bill 11, the Ohio Fairness Act.

As Auditor of the City of Columbus, I am committed to laws, policies, and practices that are inclusive of all people not just because they are socially responsible, but because they are good for business. Over the last 16 years, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that 96% of the net population growth in the City of Columbus was made up of diverse populations. We know that increasing numbers of LGBTQ people are drawn to Columbus, and we also know prospective employers are looking to do business in a city and a state with full protections for its LGBTQ employees in housing, employment, and public accommodations in order to best support their employees and their families.

Columbus is proud to have these protections in place for our residents. The lack of these basic protections, however, for the LGBTQ community at a statewide level puts us at a competitive disadvantage. Governor DeWine's executive order extending nondiscrimination protections to state employees was a good first step, but it doesn't go far enough. Ohio will continue to lose out on business and commercial activity in the absence of fully-inclusive statewide protections. This is unacceptable.

As Columbus works to attract businesses to Central Ohio, we are seeing companies place an emphasis on doing business in cities and states with these full protections. We saw this play out when Amazon launched an RFP process seeking proposals from cities to become home to their second headquarters. The company identified key preferences and decision-drivers, including the presence and support of a diverse population, a stable and consistent business climate, and a community that would support an overall high quality of life for its employees. Columbus was selected as one of 20 finalists, and quickly garnered media attention as advocacy groups encouraged Amazon to select a city located in a state with nondiscrimination protections for the LGBTQ community. Making note of such policies at the local level but not the state level, *CNN Business* reported that "you could be living in Columbus, Ohio for instance and the minute you drive out of that city you lose your rights and protections."

I was in the room when Amazon's executives told state officials that statewide nondiscrimination protections were non-negotiable. As City Auditor of the growing 14<sup>th</sup>-largest city in the nation, this is not a political issue. This is basic economics.

The landscape of employment is changing in Columbus, with more diverse populations calling the city home than ever before. Because of our size, both businesses and employees sometimes settle outside of



Columbus proper, which means that not everyone who lives in the city or works in the city falls under the protections offered by our local laws. We cannot afford to lose out on attracting talented, civic-minded, diverse individuals or the companies that want to hire those individuals. Without nondiscrimination practices in place that extend to all LGBTQ members in the state, we will continue to do so. The City of Columbus has enacted these protections for its residents. Governor DeWine has enacted these protections for state employees. I urge the members of this committee to follow suit by supporting Senate Bill 11 and offering full protections in housing, employment, and public accommodations to the LGBTQ community in Ohio.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



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