

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

My name is Noel Cummings and I am writing in support of Senate Bill 11.

I am a woman who happens to be transgender. I hold an MBA from Cleveland State University and I am a member of Beta Gamma Sigma, an international business honor society. After 25 years of progressive and successful employment with the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA), evidenced by consistent above average performance appraisals, I was passed over for promotional opportunities at the senior management and Director levels for male counterparts who were not only less qualified with respect to education and experience (high school diplomas and Associates degrees), but did not meet the minimum qualifications for the jobs established and required for appointment by the company. When I brought this matter to the attention of the CEO and suggested that I was being discriminated against based on my gender or gender identity, he did not respond to me nor did he commit to having the matter investigated. I was subsequently fired by my director, a known convicted felon, who had been rehired by the Deputy General Manager of the Operations Division. In the end, not only did I experience discrimination, but when I spoke up, there was retaliation. I was punished and my economic lifeline was taken away. As I enter the fifth year of this great struggle, the parameters of which includes complaints of fraud, executive malfeasance and cover-ups, and notice/appeals to a resistant and non-responsive GCRTA Board of Trustees and the equally resistant and non-responsive Mayor Frank Jackson and County Executive Armond Budish, the last chapter of my otherwise successful career remains in tatters. I have not been able to secure other employment or recover otherwise. What has happened to me is simply indefensible. No one should be diminished and/or destroyed in this fashion simply because they are different and dare to exercise the same agency over their lives and wellbeing that every other citizen does.

As excruciating and demoralizing as this experience has been, what has made it worse and near unbearable, is the reality that there is currently no legal recourse available to me through the State of Ohio. The state that I have called home for over thirty years; where I completed my graduate education and have enjoyed the fellowship of church family and friends for decades. I cannot fully express how it feels to know that I have been relegated to second, or third-class citizenship and that the arc of my professional possibilities and aspirations have been somehow limited simply because of who I am. All I can say is that there is a profound sense of alienation and disenfranchisement that permeates my being. But move forward, I must; and move forward, I shall. The promise I have made to myself is not to let go, give up or give in, but to triumph, not with malice for my malefactors, which would certainly be justified, but with the commitment to deconstruct this barrier and build a bridge of understanding to a better way of being.

It is my understanding that several municipalities within the State of Ohio have already recognized the importance of protecting, i.e., valuing, their residents and other constituencies equally and have accordingly passed legislation to that end. And if such actions were not taken out of a moral imperative, because it is simply the right thing to do, but economic viability because these municipalities realized that it makes them stronger as a community and better prepared to compete for the human resources and other capital, it was nonetheless appropriate and legislatively astute. The reality is the welcome mat for the venture capital and investiture that will ultimately be the keys to economic viability today, and regional survival tomorrow, must be rolled out today. And ensuring full equality for all citizens is an integral part of that welcome mat. Ohio can only be made more competitive by embracing full equality for all its citizens and opening its doors to all who are willing to employ their time, talent, and yes, treasure to make life better for one and all.

I urge you to consider passing SB11.