



*BEFORE THE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
PROPONENT TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 11*

Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Substitute Senate Bill 11 (SB 11). My name is Kevin Shimp and I am the Director of Labor and Legal Affairs for the Ohio Chamber of Commerce.

The Ohio Chamber is the state's leading business advocate, and we represent over 8,000 companies that do business in Ohio. Our mission is to aggressively champion free enterprise, economic competitiveness and growth for the benefit of all Ohioans.

In our efforts to champion economic competitiveness, the Ohio Chamber recognizes the value and power of diversity. We believe that employees deserve robust protections from discrimination and that discrimination of any type has no place in the workplace. Everyone deserves the right to do their job without fear of being discriminated against and every person, regardless of their race, color, religion, sex, military status, national origin, disability, age, ancestry, sexual orientation, or gender identity deserves equal opportunity and equal protection under the law. The protections for housing, employment, and public accommodations in SB 11 would ensure that all Ohioans can benefit from Ohio's growing workforce, enhance mutual respect between employers and employees, and further show that Ohio is a hospitable and welcoming place to live, work, and start a business.

SB 11 would also solve a regulatory compliance issue for employers by eliminating a patchwork of local labor ordinances in favor of a uniform statewide anti-discrimination standard. The Ohio Chamber's support for a statewide discrimination standard is consistent with our position on many other issues because a patchwork of local ordinances is a compliance nightmare for employers.

Twenty states and the District of Columbia currently have laws on the books outlawing discrimination in private employment based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity. In Ohio, twenty-four political sub-divisions currently have similar anti-discrimination laws on the books including Cuyahoga County, Akron, Athens, Bexley, Bowling Green, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, Columbus, Coshocton, Dayton, East Cleveland, Lakewood, Kent, Newark, Olmsted Falls, Oxford, Toledo, Yellow Springs, and Youngstown.

The Ohio Chamber has supported prior versions of this bill when we testified as a proponent of HB 160 from the 132nd General Assembly because we believe that employment decisions should be made based on an individual's qualifications, not on the basis of non-job-related characteristics.

We also want to thank the committee and the bill sponsor for making a change to the As Introduced version of SB 11 that we advocated for last General Assembly. By deleting lines 2061 through 2068 from the As Introduced bill, the Ohio Chamber believes the substitute bill eliminated a redundant statute while still preserving robust protections for those who may face discrimination based upon their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In conclusion, we urge your support for SB 11 because prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity will help businesses attract the best and brightest talent from all walks of life and ensure that Ohio is viewed as a welcoming and hospitable place to do business. It will also provide a statewide standard where there has not previously been one which will make compliance with Ohio's labor laws easier for employers in the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.