

Senate Judiciary Committee
Senate Bill 11 - Proponent Testimony
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Chairman Eklund, Vice chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Thomas and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Matt Smith and I am the Legislative Director of the Ohio American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (Ohio AFL-CIO). The State Federation represents over 600,000 organized workers in every sector of employment: from teachers to steelworkers, nurses to mineworkers, public employees to bricklayers, and everything in between. I am proud to stand here today on behalf of our union members and Ohio's working families to testify in favor of Senate Bill 11- the Ohio Fairness Act.

Working people are diverse. We are different colors, gender identities, religions, sexual orientations and ages. The labor movement has been at the forefront of the struggle for every major civil rights law. We stand strong today in the fight for dignity, life and liberty for every worker at the intersection of economic justice and civil rights.

America's legacy of racism, exclusion and injustice continues to obstruct working peoples efforts to act together to build better lives. Since its inception, the labor movement has aspired to include all working people, irrespective of race, gender, nationality, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity. Unions must mobilize to defeat the prejudices that undermine solidarity.

At the 2013 AFL-CIO Convention in Los Angeles, the labor movement renewed its commitment to diversity and equal justice for all in workplaces and communities, citing the unanimously passed 2009 Resolution 7, "A Diverse and Democratic Labor Movement." This resolution called for increased inclusion of LGBTQ workers in our society and our movement.

As stated in the 2013 AFL-CIO Convention Resolution 37: "Throughout our history, unions, particularly the AFL-CIO and its affiliates, have been leading advocates against discrimination in the workplace. However, it manifests. We were instrumental in passing

the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin. We fought for the Equal Pay Act, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act—which all prohibit on-the-job discrimination. Now, we must work to win freedom from discrimination for all workers—union members and nonunion workers.”

The Ohio Fairness Act is a rather simple piece of legislation. It simply updates the Ohio Civil Rights law by adding Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity to those already protected in housing, employment and the public sphere. This is important to the movement because even though we can, and often do, negotiate these policies into our contracts as it relates to employment discrimination, our LGBTQ members deserve the same protections as everyone else once they leave the work place.

I should note that that this proposal is something that both labor and business can agree on. We have joined with over 600 other organizations, businesses, and groups as a proud member of Ohio Business Competes. This bill is about dignity. This bill is about respect. This bill is about smart economics. Today’s top job creators seek states and communities that are welcoming to everyone, including their families, employees and customers. We’re constantly seeking new ways to make our state more competitive in order to foster job growth and make it the best place in the nation to live, work, and raise a family. That’s why I believe this is the right thing to do for Ohio’s workforce.

Segregation, inequality, and oppression harm us all. The Ohio AFL-CIO remains dedicated to demanding dignity for ALL working people, including our brothers and sisters in the LGBTQ community. That’s why it is so important that I stand before this committee today and ask for favorable passage of Senate Bill 11.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I’m happy to answer any questions you may have.