Chairman Bacon, Vice Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony this morning on House Bill 36. My name is Randle Moore and I serve as the Community Engagement Coordinator at the Greater Columbus Mpowerment Center for Equitas Health.

Equitas Health is a nonprofit, community-based health care organization serving more than 67,000 individuals across Ohio through a diverse set of services, including primary and specialized medical care, behavioral health care, dental care, HIV and STI prevention, advocacy, and case management. We are a Federally Qualified Health Center, and also operate pharmacies in Columbus and Dayton. Our mission is to be the gateway to good health for those at risk of or affected by HIV/AIDS, for the LGBTQ community, and for those seeking a welcoming health care home. A great number of our patients, clients, and staff will be negatively affected by the Pastor Protection Act if it becomes law.

I am testifying today on behalf of Equitas Health to share my strong opposition to HB 36, the so-called Pastor Protection Act. As a foundational principle, the title of this bill is a misnomer – pastors already have the protection sought here through the most sacred of American legal texts – the United States Constitution. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and Article I of Ohio’s Constitution codify a pastor’s right to refuse to do *anything* that violates their religious beliefs, including performing *any* marriage ceremony for *any* reason, including that the people to be married are not members of their parish or church, that they are divorced, or that they are gay. Proponents of the bill have argued that pastors do, in fact, need to be protected from litigious Ohioans. But the truth is, there exists no legal threat to pastors who exercise their First Amendment right to refuse to marry two people.

Recent testimony earlier this week on HB 36 suggested that the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* is potentially detrimental to religious freedom that is rightfully enshrined in both the U.S. and Ohio Constitutions. Such an assertion could not be further from the truth. The Court’s decision in *Obergefell* did nothing to erode the long-held constitutional protections for religious leaders. They do—and should—have the right to refuse to perform any task that would directly violate their moral tenets. HB 36 does nothing but unnecessarily restate this right and goes one step further by opening the door to potential discrimination.

The bill seeks to allow undefined “religious societies” to selectively refuse to make property available to host a marriage ceremony if the marriage does not conform to the minister's or society's sincerely held religious beliefs – even if those facilities are commercially open to the public. The effect of this bill will be to afford “religious societies” the option to deny people, like LGBTQ Ohioans, access to non-religious spaces like receptions halls. This is problematic; if an organization opens its space to the public to use, it should be open to everyone. Simply stated, this bill will codify discrimination in Ohio under the guise of religious freedom and protection.

We at Equitas Health work daily to ensure the good health and wellbeing of our clients, patients, and community members. This bill seeks to do the exact opposite – to slam shut to certain people doors that are otherwise open to others. At Equitas Health, we believe that religious liberty and LGBTQ rights can and should coexist. But allowing the sort of discrimination inherent in this bill’s language does not belong in our state’s law. I urge you to stand up for Ohioans in the face of this blatant act of discrimination and to oppose HB 36.

Thank you again for allowing me to offer testimony today and I would be happy to answer any questions the committee members may have.

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