

Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Thomas Grote and I am speaking in support of Senate Bill 11.

I am a father, a husband, an entrepreneur, and a lifelong Ohioan. I grew up on the south-side of Columbus working in the very first Donatos pizza shop (the family business). I graduated with a degree in finance from Miami University of Ohio and later was honored to serve as a member of the board of trustees. After Miami, I joined the business full time and helped expand our small family business throughout the state. Today, Donatos employs over 3000 people in Ohio.

I also serve on the board of the Grote Manufacturing company which has manufactured food processing equipment since 1972. We have grown through ups and downs in the economy and continue to manufacture right here in central Ohio and export throughout the world.

I have been involved with several start-up companies in renewable energy and food technology, and most recently have invested in a 3D food printing company also located here in Central Ohio. Because of our investment, the founders moved here from Houston.

Donatos first put non-discrimination protections for our LGBT associates in place in the 1990s, long before the majority of other companies. That commitment is a fundamental part of our story of success.

On behalf of all of these businesses trying to attract and retain the best and brightest talent, please advance SB11 to make Ohio a more competitive and welcoming state. As an entrepreneur and someone who has been intimately involved in business throughout my life, I know how important it is for our employees to feel safe, protected, valued, and included in the workplace. Having non-discrimination protections in place empowers our employees to perform at their best.

On a personal note, I can share with you that being gay has not been an easy road for me. I came out in the early 1990's and I struggled. Fortunately, my family supported me and as a result, I have had an incredible couple of decades helping to build businesses here in Ohio, getting married and adopting two beautiful girls. It could have been very different for me. Rejection can do a tremendous amount of damage. And rejection in the workplace hurts not only one's ability to support themselves and their family, but also can do a lot of emotional and psychological damage. It is important to recognize the human toll of discrimination and rejection.

SB11 sends a message to all employees and employers that they are welcome in Ohio. And that is good for Ohio's economy and Ohio's future.

Thank you for your time today.