

Thank you all for coming this morning. My name is Lynne Bowman and I'm the Executive Director of Equality Ohio – Ohio's statewide education and advocacy organization for issues related to equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. On behalf of our board and the many people whose lives will be changed by this legislation, thank you Representatives Dan Stewart and Ross McGregor for your leadership on this important topic.

Today House Bill 176, the Equal Housing and Employment Act, begins its path towards Governor Strickland's desk. This is a bill whose time has come.

We live in a state where it is currently legal to fire someone or deny them a place to live simply because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**It is time** for Ohio to remove the barriers at our borders that tell people they are not welcome in our state if they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

We are not asking for something that is uncommon...twenty states and the District of Columbia, 433 of the Fortune 500 companies, 11 of Ohio's 13, four-year public universities, 16 Ohio cities and the House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate already ban discrimination based on sexual orientation.

**It is time** that *all* Ohio cities and villages, all Ohioans, have the same protections from discrimination, regardless of where they live, work or play.

Nondiscrimination, a call for basic equal treatment and human kindness, is not a partisan issue. It is not a controversial issue. It should not be a difficult issue to support.

**It is time** that the entire Ohio legislature joins the more than 25% of the Ohio House members who have sponsored the

legislation and the 72% of Ohioans who support the passage of the bill and vote for fairness and equal protection.

It's time to do what's right for Ohio and Ohioans. It's time for our laws to match our values. Its time for the passage of the Equal Housing and Employment Act, House Bill 176.

The public supports it. Our top business leaders embrace it. Fairness demands it.

We are pleased again this year to have strong bi-partisan primary sponsors in the House in our friends Representatives Dan Stewart and Ross McGregor. Representative Stewart?