

Chairwoman Baker, Senator Tartaglione, and members of the Senate Labor & Industry Committee, it is a great pleasure to address you regarding nondiscrimination protections for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community of Pennsylvania.

The question before us today is about what kind of Pennsylvania we want to build for the next generation. We have an opportunity to accelerate and expand the economic growth we've seen in some parts of the state in recent years, and to attract and retain the best and the brightest talent. We can do that by finally and definitively declaring that we value hard work, dedication and determination – and that no one should ever lose their job simply because of who they are or whom they love.

This important conversation has already occurred in many states across the country – and virtually all of our neighboring Northeastern states. It's also a conversation that's already happened in many of Pennsylvania's biggest cities and smallest towns; 36 municipalities have enacted similar ordinances ensuring that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Pennsylvanians are protected from discrimination in the workplace. From Erie to Philadelphia and Pittsburgh to Doylestown, these protections have been on the books with none of the fear-driven consequences that our opponents will claim.

At the end of the day, this conversation is about the values we all hold dear. We all believe in treating others fairly, equally and with respect. After all, that's the Golden Rule – treat others the way you would wish to be treated. So it's no surprise that 95% of Pennsylvanians believe that everyone, including gay and trans people, should be able to earn a living and should be hired, fired or promoted based on their qualifications and accomplishments alone. Every one of us in this room comes to work each and every day, and gives it our all. No one would want to lose their job simply because of who they are. At its core, SB 1307 provides every Pennsylvanian the freedom to work without fear of being fired for simply being oneself.

No one understands the importance of these values better than Corporate America. All 18 of Pennsylvania's Fortune 500 companies already have nondiscrimination policies in place. Nearly 1,000 businesses, including some of the state's largest employers such as UPMC, Campbell's, PNC,

Dow, AT&T, and The Hershey Company, have publicly stated that they believe the PA Human Relations Act should be amended to include sexual orientation and gender identity. These companies have long understood that nondiscrimination policies are good for attracting and retaining talented workers.

These businesses support nondiscrimination protections not only because they're the right thing to do, but also because attracting and retaining the best talent often means creating policies that align with Millennials. Millennials seek diverse, vibrant communities where not only they can flourish, but their peers can be who they are without mistreatment. If Pennsylvania wants to both keep its young ones from leaving and attract new ones to stay, it must ensure that its workforce will not feel threatened by policy that leaves anyone at risk of unfair discrimination.

Opponents to these protections will insist on two main arguments: the need for greater religious exemptions and a fear-based argument about Pennsylvania's transgender community. While the other people testifying can speak directly to those concerns, we already know that the delicate balance between religious freedom and civil protections can exist. Let's be clear: the freedom of religion is one of our most cherished values. It's protected under the U.S. Constitution and state law. No one is trying to change that. These same arguments were made when the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act was initially passed in 1955. For over sixty years the Commonwealth has continued to understand that religious liberty and civil rights prevails side-by-side; only by continuing on parallel tracks can we make sure that the balance is maintained.

Nearly 75% of Pennsylvanians believe that it is already illegal for someone to be fired for being gay or transgender. For nearly three-fourths of our state, the passage of this bill would solidify a value we already hold dear. But for the LGBT youth of generations to come whom we want to protect and support in our home state, this bill is much more than a rule on a piece of paper – it is hope for a bright, prosperous, and equal future.