



Anti-Discrimination Law Introduced In House and Senate

For Immediate Release: March 11, 2008

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COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Insisting that Ohio's laws must be updated to reflect Ohioans' values, a trio of state legislators introduced bills to make it illegal to discriminate against a person in employment, housing or public accommodations because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

"Ohio is among the most unwelcoming states in the nation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people," said Lynne Bowman, executive director of Equality Ohio. "Today, Ohio took a major step toward fairness and equality."

Bowman cited a recent survey showing that two-thirds of Ohioans favor passage of the legislation.

Twenty-one states, 11 of Ohio's 13, four-year public colleges and 16 Ohio cities and villages have ordinances that protect their gay and lesbian residents. Rather than continue to allow a patchwork of protections – or none at all -- the legislators called for passage of statewide standards that would uniformly help all Ohio residents.

"Where you live should not determine the extent of your rights," Sen. Dale Miller, a Cleveland Democrat, told a Statehouse news conference Tuesday.

Miller, the main sponsor of the Senate bill, had introduced similar legislation in the past but noted that today's measures have a record number of co-sponsors, the endorsement of Gov. Ted Strickland and the promise of committee hearings.

In the House, sponsor Rep. Jon Peterson, a Delaware Republican, called the legislation "a matter of human dignity," and said, "America was founded on the principle of equality for all, but Ohio's laws only demand equality for some."

Peterson and Democratic Rep. Dan Stewart of Columbus sponsored the House bill.

Stewart pointed out that more than 90 percent of Fortune 500 companies have implemented similar policies and major Ohio employers, such as Nationwide Insurance, say Ohio's reputation for intolerance harms its ability to attract and retain top-tier employees.

"Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to serve their community is an important part of moving Ohio forward," Stewart said.

Joining the legislators was central Ohio school teacher Jimmie Beall, who told how she lost her job with the London City Schools after the district learned that she is a lesbian.

"I was devastated," Beall said. "When I consulted with legal experts, they all gave the same answer: My family did not have the legal protections afforded to most other families. We were left with no health insurance, no benefits and no sense of security."

Beall said she decided to tell her story, hoping it would convince legislators of the need to update Ohio's law.

"It's time to do what's right," Beall said.