

## Testimony to the Commerce Committee

12/03/2014

Mira Krishnan (616) 458-3511  
Chief Executive Officer mira.krishnan@grlgbt.org  
The Network www.grlgbt.org



Dear Chairman Foster and esteemed members of the Commerce Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of HB 5804 to amend the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act in a *fully inclusive* fashion, protecting Michiganders from discrimination based on gender identity and expression as well as sexual orientation. I firmly believe both protections are needed, and that HB 5959 does not go far enough.

I want to speak to you from two lenses. First, for the past three years, I have been creating healthcare jobs in West Michigan. My team and I have created almost 30 full time jobs in three years. My people gain in-demand skills in autism treatment, and they change kids' lives. I mostly recruit young people leaving higher education, but I also recruit talent nationally. And I *market* West Michigan. To do so, I talk about our amazing local food and breweries, our arts, our theatre. I talk about the visionary steps Grand Rapids has taken, like passing protections similar to those in HB 5804. In this light, West Michigan looks a lot more appealing to outsiders who've been taught we're just another bolt in the "rust belt." I use these stories, too, to convince Michigan graduates to stay here and invest rather than moving out of state. It works, in large part, because of the inclusive and vibrant place Grand Rapids has become. If you look to the future in Michigan, you should look to Grand Rapids. And as someone out there creating jobs and building the local economy there, passing this fully inclusive bill, that sends the message that Michigan as a whole, like Grand Rapids, is open for *everybody* to come to work, and is seeking to be fully (and not half) world class, is exactly what we need to continue building this state back up and making it a great state again.

My second lens, and my second job, is advocating on behalf of the LGBT community. After many years of prayer and reflection, I came out as transgender, in Grand Rapids. This process started almost a year ago and culminated with me finally living authentically in all parts of my life in July. I was met with overwhelming support and graciousness. My community recognized the risk I was taking and was courageous alongside me. I got, unlike many people, to be myself without having to sacrifice any of the people I love in my family, my neighborhood, my civic life, or my professional network. I didn't face discrimination, either in housing or in the workplace. I just got to continue using my talents right here in Michigan. Except it was finally *me* in my home, and not some stranger staring at me in the mirror. In today's Michigan, where I can be fired or denied housing based on being transgender, this makes me "one of the lucky ones."

Revising ELCRA creates a level playing field for all of us, including LGBT Michiganders. But, I don't want to escape or avoid the fact that I'm asking you, as legislators and leaders, to do this for "people like me." I am. But I mean it in both senses: people like me who are LGBT, and people like me who are trying to build something great here in Michigan. We all benefit when Michigan takes steps to open its doors for all people to come to work, and when Michigan lets us builders build and innovators innovate. For this reason, again, please move forward with the fully inclusive HB 5804, and continue to help me make Michigan great again. Thank you very much for your time.