**Michigan House of Representatives**
**Commerce Committee**
**Hearing on House Bills 5804 and 5959**
**December 3, 2014**

**Testimony Submitted by:**

Good Morning.

I'm Leslee Fritz, Deputy Director of the Michigan Department of Civil Rights. I am joined by our Director of Law and Policy, Dan Levy. We are here today to join so many other voices in calling for fairness and equality for all Michigan people through expansion of the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity.

Our statement will be very brief to respect to those other voices, but will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

The Michigan Civil Rights Commission and the Michigan Department of Civil Rights have long advocated that protection from discrimination based sexual orientation and gender identity should be added to Elliott-Larsen.

In 1977 – just months after the original act went into effect - the MCRC published a "Sexual Orientation Report and Recommendations." This report examined and addressed myths about the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) population.

Since then, the Civil Rights Commission has issued a number of calls to amend Elliott-Larsen to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation - as long ago as 1983 ... and as recently as last week at their meeting in Kalamazoo. You will find that resolution attached to our written submission.

And in 2013, the Commission published a report which examined the economic impact of discrimination against LGBT individuals. This report, which is also attached to our written testimony, is based on public forums, surveys, and archival research, examined the impact of discrimination policies (or the lack thereof) on individuals, families and communities in Michigan.

The report conclusively establishes that the economic implications of LGBT discrimination are real, substantial and predictable.

- Wage and income inequality means same sex couples have a median income 25% below their heterosexual counterparts despite higher average education levels.
- The children in LGBT families are twice as likely to be raised in poverty as children raised by heterosexual couples.
- Graduate students – the very talent we all agree we need to keep in Michigan to strengthen our economy - regardless of their sexual orientation, consider demographic diversity, political climate and inclusiveness of state laws when deciding whether to stay here after graduation.
- Businesses both follow the talent they seek, and seek to locate where their existing talent will be welcomed.

Simply put, allowing discrimination – even against a few of our people – has a real cost to all of us.

Read the report. Examine the research. Read the stories. Consider the economic impact of continuing to allow discrimination in Michigan.

We urge that you approve the language of the inclusive bill that is before you today, because Michigan should neither condone nor ignore discrimination of any kind.

Whether you are motivated by the interests of individuals within Michigan, or by the interests of the state as a whole – whether you vote yes in order to protect LGBT Michiganders, or in order to support Michigan's business climate – or maybe simply because it is the right thing to do, we ask that you adopt the inclusive language and report the bill with a recommendation that it pass.

Thank you.