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My name is Matt Yarnell and I'm the President of SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania. Our union represents over 45,000 health care workers across the Commonwealth working in hospitals, nursing homes, state facilities and caring for seniors and people with disabilities in their home. Additionally, a core part of our organization's mission is to strive for a fair and just society for all people.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today and discuss Senate Bill 1306, which is one of the important steps to achieving comprehensive nondiscrimination protections for LGBT Pennsylvanians. At SEIU, we make sure all our members have discrimination protections through their contracts. It's time all workers – union or non-union – have those same rights.

Passing SB 1306 will not only fight discrimination, it will ensure the social, physical, and economic health of our great state. It's an issue I feel very strongly about, both professionally and personally.

It's almost incomprehensible to think that workers in Pennsylvania can be denied a job or fired simply because of who they are and who they love. In fact, a recent survey of Pennsylvania residents showed that 73% incorrectly believed discrimination against gay and transgender individuals in the workplace and in housing and business services is already illegal. Sadly, that is not the case.

38% of LGBT workers say they've experienced harassment or discrimination in some way, including wage inequity, unfair hiring practices, or being denied family benefits.

This can have a devastating effect on communities. There are over 270-thousand LGBT adults in Pennsylvania. While 32% are protected by *local* non-discrimination ordinances, 68% can be legally fired simply for being LGBT. This can leave capable, skilled workers unemployed and turning to public assistance. Additionally, one in six same-sex couples are raising children. If parents don't have employment stability, those children could carry the psychological and physical burdens of poverty.

This kind of discrimination also harms employers, coworkers, and Pennsylvania's economy. Business and organizations that create diverse and inclusive workplaces can more easily attract and retain top talent. We want Pennsylvania to be a place people come to work, buy homes, and build lives. Without discrimination protections, those talented people will go elsewhere.

Businesses and organizations that are inclusive also benefit financially, through decreased costs associated with absenteeism and turnover. They also have higher employee satisfaction, which boosts productivity, innovation, and can result in higher profits.

Many companies are already getting the message. 15 of the 23 Fortune 500 companies based in Pennsylvania have policies prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, including Comcast, Hershey Foods, Rite Aid, and Sunoco.

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And many unions, like SEIU, ensure that these protections are in all contracts.

Updating discrimination laws also has widespread support. A recent poll found that 69% of small businesses and 72% of Pennsylvanians support these measures. As for costs? A comprehensive look at these issues from The Williams Institute found the cost of enforcing LGBT complaints would be negligible – at most, only about 2.4% of the Human Relation Commission’s budget, and the benefits far exceed that.

I stated earlier that is a personal issue for me as well.

Growing up gay in Centre County Pennsylvania was not easy. It was not an area that accepted people who are “different.” The bullying and hatred I faced in high school became so overwhelming, I made the decision to leave school and pursue my GED. I was forced out of high school simply because I didn’t fit in.

Sometimes it’s hard to believe how far we’ve come since then. If I was to tell my teenage self that, in 2016, I would be legally married to my wonderful husband and raising two amazing sons, I probably wouldn’t have believed it.

But we’re not done, and those strides alone are not enough. The LGBT community still faces great obstacles and unfathomable hatred, as was clearly evident by this year’s Orlando nightclub shooting.

Pennsylvania needs to lead the way. We need to do better.

Bullies still exist – and the fact that our LGBT community can face *completely legal* discrimination and hatred in Pennsylvania workplaces is unconscionable. No one should be able to be fired simply because of who they love, or who they are.

It is time to pass full, comprehensive LGBT anti-discrimination measures, including Senate Bills 1306, 1307, 1316 and House Bill 1510. Doing so will build a stronger Pennsylvania by making sure all people are respected, valued, and protected.

Thank you.