

The Employment Non-Discrimination Act

Testimony of Nancy Kramer

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Thank you to Chairman Andrews and the members of the subcommittee for inviting me to present my point of view about a topic for which I am very passionate. As a business owner and entrepreneur, I am here to talk about the importance of creating a workplace that welcomes the best and the brightest, from all walks of life. Discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender workers deprives American business of too many talented and hardworking people. In my twenty-six years running a business, I have learned that an inclusive workplace, which judges people on their merits, not on unrelated matters like sexual orientation or gender identity, is the key to success in a competitive, ever-changing marketplace.

When I started Resource Interactive as a traditional marketing services company with two partners in 1981, the working world was very different. The Internet, the basis for our entire business today, wasn't even conceived. We were lucky to start with an innovative and progressive client – Apple Computer – that set the tone for our culture from day one. But I, as a woman, experienced discrimination in the business world. When I bought out my partners in 1984, I couldn't even get a basic line of credit for the business without my then husband as a co-signer. In fact, over the years, as a woman in business, I've been

second-guessed, underestimated, and even propositioned more often than I care to remember. I understand what it means to be discriminated against in the workplace.

Looking back, it is hard to believe that my gender potentially stood in the way of my success as a businessperson. It is equally baffling that, today, members of the GLBT community see their desire simply to do a job, and do it well, thwarted by being who they are.

As the world changes, business leaders know that they must also change to remain competitive. My company has embraced new technologies and become a leading digitally-focused marketing firm, growing from just the three of us in 1981 to over 200 employees today. Along the way we have acquired great clients like Hewlett-Packard, Procter & Gamble, Best Buy and L.L. Bean. Like us, these corporations recognize that the key to success is to create an environment that recruits, retains and rewards talented associates regardless of characteristics unrelated to job performance. This simple premise has led nearly 90% of Fortune 500 companies to adopt nondiscrimination policies that include sexual orientation, with a quarter of them also including gender identity.

I have had the great fortune to lead a small business to success, and to be recognized for those efforts. I was honored to have recently been appointed by Governor Ted Strickland as Chairman of the Governor's Workforce Policy Advisory Board for the State of Ohio. My business, Resource Interactive, has received national recognition for its innovative workplace environment from sources as varied as *Business Week*, *Working Woman, Inc.*

magazine and *Interactive Week*; and just this past year, was recognized by the Ohio Chamber of Commerce as Best Place to Work in the State of Ohio.

Over the years, I have learned that living a secret life is not good for anyone; in fact it's highly destructive—especially in the workplace. I am extremely proud of the fact that our company's culture encourages people to be the same person on the outside that they are on the inside, not live in secret. Preparing for today, I was reflecting on some of our past and present Resource associates. There are at least a half dozen examples of folks who entered our business projecting the 'acceptable' sexual orientation, but eventually realized being who they really are was not only accepted at Resource, but embraced.

As a CEO, public board director, and entrepreneur, I know you need every talented person you can hire. Passing the Employment Non-Discrimination Act will not create a burden on businesses, large or small. Instead, it will ensure that hardworking GLBT Americans can earn a living, provide for their families, and contribute to the innovation and creativity that makes American business great. And, it's simply smart business.

Two of my daughters are here with me today. I am grateful that, because laws have changed, they won't have to face the same discrimination I faced 26 years ago. I have always taught them that every person has value and should be judged on his or her merit. I brought them to Washington with me today in hopes they might witness the first step toward eliminating workplace discrimination for all those Americans in the GLBT

community. I thank you for your time and I strongly encourage you to pass this extremely important legislation.