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**Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on
“The Equality Act: LGBTQ Rights are Human Rights”**

Chairman, Senator Richard J. Durbin (D-IL)

March 17, 2021

**Thank you, Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley,
Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak
today for so many who are depending on all of you to not only speak,
but to legislate equal treatment under the law for them. Like all of you,
I have multiple identities. I am a person of faith, an African-American
woman, a leader of a faith institution, and a mother. I am also one of
hundreds of thousands of members of PFLAG and am honored to
serve as a member of the National Board of Directors. But of all my
identities, the most important will always be: a mother. My husband
and I have two adult children; they couldn't be more different and that
has always been true. They have both made their own paths, and we
are proud of them both.**

At 14, our older child, Bryan came out to us first as gay and later as a trans non-binary person. Bryan never had any doubt that they would be loved and accepted for who they are because that is the message they always received from my husband and me and from the faith community of the United Church of Christ. As an extrovert, Bryan wanted to be fully out to everyone. But at the time, my husband and I said no; not because we were ashamed but because we were afraid for Bryan's safety — being Black and gay in a predominantly white community and school; you bet we were afraid. As a child, Bryan had to live a conflictual reality; loved and accepted at home and church, but not fully affirmed or protected in other places. Without the Equality Act, the law does not fully protect me as a woman, and it does not protect my trans non-binary child.

Like all parents, I want the best for both of my children. I want Bryan to have the same protections and rights as my other child Michael. While Bryan has never had to worry about acceptance by their family or faith community, their life is still like that of many LGBTQ+ people, choices framed or limited by external forces. Michael can choose to live wherever he pleases. Bryan makes those choices based on where they feel safe and local law protects them. We should

all be able to agree on this one thing: The law should treat all our children -- God's children -- equally.

All of our children deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Every single one of us would go to the mat for our children; none of us wants them to be turned away or discriminated against for any reason.

I understand that we all come at this question from different places. And maybe this seems so simple to me because I consider the merits of the Equality Act as an African-American woman who knows all too well the impact and legacy of racial discrimination. I also know how religion and faith were used to justify slavery. But that was wrong and many; most faith communities today admit that. I think we can learn from that history. No one should be denied rights and services because of who they are or who they love. Any kind of discrimination is inconsistent with the God of love that I know and trust.

Many denominations, including my own, United Church of Christ, already welcome LGBTQI+ persons fully into our communities of faith and value their leadership as gifted and cherished children of

God. We fully support the Equality Act. While that matters to me, what matters most will always be my children. I am here as Bryan's mother primarily and for other mothers, and yes, as a person of faith. Faith is always very personal. What I believe matters. It matters that I believe that God is love; it matters that I believe in the Biblical verse Do unto Others As You would have them Do Unto You. But what really matters for Bryan, (for me as a woman) is the law. The Equality Act is a way for this country to make that tenant of my faith, known as the Biblical Golden Rule, the law of the land. It really is that simple.

Thank you.