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March 8, 2021

The Honorable Kelly Breen
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
PO Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Representative Breen:

Serving the business community for 120 years, the Detroit Regional Chamber is happy to restate our support for SB 4 and House Bill 4003. Expanding the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to cover sexual orientation, gender identity and expression is a critical step in communicating Michigan's knowledge that when it comes to talent, the best team wins.

For further perspective, I have attached a copy of a recent op-ed co-written by the Chamber's President and Chief Executive Officer, Sandy K. Baruah in support of ELCRA expansion. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Brad Williams
Vice President, Government Relations

Enclosure: Expanding Civil Rights is Good for Michigan's Economy, *The Detroit News*,
February 22, 2023

cc: Members, House Judiciary Committee

The Detroit News
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OPINION *This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.*

Baruah and Knott: Expanding civil rights is good for Michigan's economy

Sandy Baruah and Erin Knott

Published 8:00 p.m., ET Feb. 22, 2023 | Updated 6:41 a.m., ET Feb. 23, 2023

During her State of the State Address, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said what the business community and advocates for equality have been arguing for over a decade: “bigotry is bad for business.” As employers compete with other states for the talent they need to effectively serve their customers, their current and prospective employees demand that they engage in society in new ways.

Support for the LGBTQ+ community is not just a human rights issue. It is an economic issue. The Michigan Legislature can give Michigan a leg up by expanding the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA) to include sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression.

In November, the Detroit Regional Chamber issued the findings of a voter poll that found that 59.1% of Michiganians would take a state’s position on social issues into account when deciding whether to accept a job. This number increases considerably for workers under 40.

Michigan’s growth is dependent on a growing and vibrant population. Employers of every size report struggling to find workers. From low-wage workers to high-tech engineers, Michigan must be open to everyone who wants to be part of our success story regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

Thankfully, the overwhelming majority of Michiganians agree. Recent public polling indicates that 83% of voters believe in expanding the ELCRA to protect the LGBTQ+ community. The first member of the Legislature to introduce legislation to

expand the ELCRA was Republican Representative Jim Dressel, and has since been supported by Democratic and some Republican members of the Legislature.

It is not just Michigan residents looking for equality; it is the global businesses that Michigan is trying to attract. When our leaders travel the United States and the world, they will be able to point to Michigan as a beacon of freedom for all, while many of the states we compete with continue to restrict the individual liberties of LGBTQ+ residents. In Michigan, we know that the team with the best talent will win, and the best team has people of different colors, who pray differently, love differently, and present differently. That is our strength and not our weakness.

In 1976, the ELCRA was introduced in the Michigan Legislature by Democrat Daisy Elliott and Republican Melvin L. Larsen, hence Elliott-Larsen. The bill banned discrimination in employment, housing, education, and access to public services in Michigan based on religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight, family status or marital status. It was signed into law in January 1977 by Republican Gov. William Milliken.

In January 2023, Michigan lawmakers called for a new amendment to the ELCRA of 1976. They proposed an amendment to protect the rights of all Michigan residents regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Amending Elliott-Larsen is not a new practice. Since its initial passage in 1976, the act has been amended 20 times to further protect civil rights in Michigan. It is time to extend equal protections to Michigan's LGBTQ+ community.

Most people in this state want more equality and less discrimination. Workplaces and other professional environments that are LGBTQ+ inclusive and nondiscriminatory encourage better job dedication, stronger relationships in the workforce, and higher levels of work ethic and job satisfaction. By amending the ELCRA, Michigan will become a more welcoming place and attract more people to start businesses or jobs here, strengthening the economy.

Our shared goal is to build a stronger and more inclusive society — a state where people can find accessible housing, high-quality education opportunities, and a good-paying job. The Legislature should pass the bill expanding the ELCRA and send it to the governor's desk as soon as possible.

Sandy K. Baruah is president and CEO of the Detroit Regional Chamber. Erin Knott is executive director of Equality Michigan.