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OHIO LEGISLATIVE SERVICE COMMISSION

Office of Research
and Drafting

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Office

H.B. 369
133rd General Assembly

Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

[Click here for H.B. 369's Bill Analysis](#)

Version: As Introduced

Primary Sponsors: Reps. Hillyer and Skindell

Local Impact Statement Procedure Required: No

Jessica Murphy, Budget Analyst

Highlights

- The number of new charges that could be filed with the Ohio Civil Rights Commission alleging discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression is estimated at up to 100 or more annually. It is unclear how much of an increase in annual filings the Commission can absorb before additional funding would be needed to hire new investigators/mediators. The Commission estimates the annual cost of one full-time equivalent investigative staff person at \$80,000, inclusive of benefits.
- It appears there will be few additional civil actions filed with any given court of common pleas, with courts generally likely to absorb the work and costs using existing staff and resources.
- Presumably, state and local governments generally will comply with the bill's discrimination provisions, with any alleged violations occurring relatively infrequently. The timing and magnitude of any legal judgments or settlements related to a discrimination violation is indeterminate.

Detailed Analysis

The bill adds sexual orientation and gender identity or expression to the list of protected classes in existing prohibitions against unlawful discriminatory practices. The bill requires that the Ohio Civil Rights Commission exercise certain of its existing powers and duties with respect to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.

General Accounting Office employment discrimination report¹

In July 2013, the federal government's General Accounting Office (GAO) released a report of employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The report summarized its 2012 survey of 21 states (plus the District of Columbia) that prohibited sexual orientation-based employment discrimination, 18 of which also prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of gender identity.

According to the data in the report covering 2007 through 2012, sexual orientation filings ranged from 1.79% to 6.78% of all employment discrimination cases, with the average and median percentages at 3.95% and 4.11%, respectively. Filings related to gender identity generally accounted for less than 1% of cases. The general conclusion of the survey states that "...there were relatively few employment discrimination complaints based on sexual orientation and gender identity filed in these states during this time period."

Ohio Civil Rights Commission

Employment-based complaint filings

The bill's prohibition against discrimination on the basis of these additional characteristics will increase to some degree the number of discrimination charges filed annually with the Commission.

In FY 2019, the Commission closed 2,590 total employment discrimination filings; this number has remained relatively constant for several years. If one assumes that, subsequent to the bill's enactment, Ohio's experience will mirror the GAO findings, then adding sexual orientation and gender identity or expression to a list of covered characteristics that can be the basis for unlawful discriminatory practices under the existing law will generate up to 100 or more filings for the Commission to resolve annually.

In FY 2019, the Commission's 40 investigative/mediation staff closed over 3,600 cases (employment, housing, public accommodation, credit, and disability), an average of 90 cases per investigator/mediator. It is unclear as to how many new filings resulting from the bill that the Commission can process to closure within the statutory timelines at their current staffing level without funding to hire additional investigators/mediators. The Commission estimates the annual cost of one full-time equivalent investigative staff person at \$80,000, inclusive of benefits.

Courts of common pleas

Under current law, an individual alleging discrimination has the right to file an action in the appropriate court of common pleas, although the filing of a civil action is more often the exception rather than the rule. Presumably, the resolution of new discriminatory practices under the bill would follow a similar path: the filing of a complaint with the Commission as opposed to the filing of a civil action in the appropriate court of common pleas. This suggests that the courts generally will be able to absorb additional cases using currently available staff and resources.

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/660/656443.pdf>.

State and local governments as respondents or defendants

State of Ohio

Effective January 14, 2019, Governor DeWine signed an executive order expiring on his last day as Governor of Ohio unless rescinded before that, establishing a policy that bans discrimination of current or prospective state employees on the basis of a person's characteristics, including gender identity or expression, or sexual orientation. Thus, as the bill would codify the executive order, it should have no fiscal effect on the state.

Local governments

Under current law, unchanged by the bill, a local government (county, municipality, township, school district, or special district) faces potential financial liabilities if found to have engaged in certain prohibited discriminatory practices. As a result, the bill could lead to a civil action, or a discrimination charge, being filed against a local government based on the covered characteristics of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. In such cases, the local government could incur costs related to the adjudication and settlement of a case, which may include attorney fees incurred by the injured party in addition to any damages awarded. The timing and magnitude of such costs is indeterminate. It should be noted that some governments, including the cities of Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dayton, and Toledo, have already enacted ordinances, code provisions, or internal policies prohibiting such discriminatory actions based on sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression. That said, it is presumed that local governments who do not have such internal policies in place will generally comply with the bill's discrimination provisions, with any alleged violations occurring relatively infrequently.