

**Kenneth Charles
Vice President, Global Diversity & Inclusion
General Mills, Inc.**

**Testimony to the
Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
Hearing – Equality At Work: The Employment Non-Discrimination Act
June 12, 2012**

Thank you Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi for the opportunity to speak today in support of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 2007 (S.811). And thank you distinguished members of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. My name is Ken Charles and I am vice president of Global Diversity and Inclusion at General Mills. We are among the world's largest food companies and market some of the world's best-loved brands, including Cheerios, Green Giant, Nature Valley, Progresso, and Yoplait, to name a few. We have 35,000 employees worldwide with about half working in the United States. We are headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota – where we trace our roots back over 150 years – and last fiscal year had annual sales of close to \$15 billion.

Our business case for Diversity & Inclusion is a simple equation. Diversity plus inclusion equals business value. When you combine diversity, which we define simply as difference, with a culture that acknowledges, respects, and values all of our differences and similarities, good things happen. We find ourselves able to connect with our consumers, customers and communities. We reap new ideas and innovation. And we recruit and retain the talent to win now and in the future.

We are honored to represent Corporate America's support for passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). Hundreds of companies, including 87% of the Fortune 500, have enacted protections for employees based on sexual orientation. General Mills believes this legislation is good for business and good for America because it will:

- Help businesses attract and retain top talent.
- Help provide a safe, comfortable and productive work environment, free from any form of discrimination or harassment, enabling our employees to bring their full selves to work and be fully engaged as productive employees.
- Help create a culture that fosters the creativity and innovation that is vital to the success of all businesses.

We market our products to everyone. On average, U.S. consumers are placing one of our products in their baskets every ten seconds. So it just makes good business sense to value all of our consumers, which we do. But it also makes good business sense to create a workforce that represents all of the varied consumers and their unique perspectives. We can't win if we only access a portion of the strong American talent pool. It's critical that we eliminate barriers that allow an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity to be a consideration for employment, promotion or compensation.

Employees who are members of the GLBT community are incredible contributors to our enterprise. Absent their unique perspectives, talents, and gifts, we would be less competitive and successful. Simply said, talent matters. Now more than ever, American business needs to leverage the ingenuity of all sectors for our nation. Discriminatory barriers to top talent just don't make business sense.

Respected employees are productive and engaged employees. We strive to be an environment where every employee is respected, valued, challenged and rewarded for their individual contribution and performance. Our work environment is built on the foundation of our Equal Employment Opportunity policy, which prohibits discrimination based on age, race, color, religion, sex, national origin, marital status, disability, citizenship, sexual orientation, gender identity, military service, or other characteristic protected by law. Sexual orientation has been a part of our policy since the early 1990s and we added gender identity in 2004.

We know our policy and, more importantly, our company culture exemplifies the spirit of the proposed Employment Non-Discrimination Act. In fact, a record-setting 94 percent of our employees say General Mills provides a working environment accepting of differences in background and lifestyle.

It's important that we speak to the impact when that's not the case, particularly for GLBT employees. Could you be engaged, productive, effective if you lived in fear - fear of losing your job, being denied a promotion, being harassed or bullied on the job? For many qualified, hardworking Americans this is their experience because they lack the basic protection a consistent federal law would provide. Their lack of engagement is a tax on American productivity that can be eliminated with the passage of ENDA.

I think of a manager that reported to me. He was a Recruiter for our company and proudly displayed a picture of himself with his partner on his desk. No different from any other family picture except that it had two gay men. Being able to share his family portrait allowed him to bring his full self to work. Freed of being in the closet on the job, he could focus his full attention on finding the best and brightest for our company. I'm even prouder when I see this diversity prominently represented by *all* kinds of family pictures displayed in peoples' offices at General Mills.

Our culture of inclusion has been regularly recognized by a variety of external groups. Just this April, General Mills was recognized as the Most Reputable Company in America. For many years we have achieved a 100 percent score on the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index, which recognizes the policies and practices we have that are supportive of our GLBT employees. We have also been honored as one of the:

- 100 Best Companies to Work For by Fortune magazine
- 100 Best Corporate citizens by Corporate Responsibility magazine
- 10 Best Companies for Working Mothers in Working Mother magazine and
- Top 50 Companies for Diversity by DiversityInc

We know that providing an environment where people of different backgrounds and lifestyles can grow and thrive is essential to our long-term success. In our business, innovation is the key to survival. People with diverse experiences and backgrounds bring different and uniquely valuable perspectives and solutions. This diversity drives innovation. That innovation fuels our growth and allows us to win in the global marketplace. That's why we support any practice or public policy that encourages bringing diversity to the table.

Internally, we've done several things to encourage diversity. In the mid-1990s, we created our GLBT network, Betty's Family, named after one of our most familiar icons – Betty Crocker. This network's mission is to create a safe, open and productive environment for General Mills' GLBT employees and allies. Our employees comment frequently on the powerful impact this network has on our ability to recruit and retain top talent. We know this network, in addition to our many other affinity groups, is a tangible demonstration of our commitment to attracting, developing and advancing every unique employee.

We also understand that establishing a culture of respect is a baseline for our employment standards. Beyond that, we strive to be an employer of choice – a place where we demonstrate support for the personal needs of our employees to allow them to be fully committed to their work. In 1999, we introduced Domestic Partner benefits, another demonstration that we are committed to providing equality to our GLBT employees in all of our employment benefits. And we recently affirmed that we provide equal health coverage for transgender individuals without exclusion for medically necessary care.

In addition to promoting diversity because of its benefits to our business, we support the ENDA legislation because we believe it is a fundamental right of all American citizens to be treated fairly, with respect and dignity in the workplace, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Our support mirrors the state in which we are headquartered – Minnesota – which is one of 21 states with laws preventing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and one of 16 that also includes gender identity. Our company values clearly state, "We do the right thing all of the time." We believe the federal protection afforded to citizens by ENDA will be both a symbolic and effective means to deliver civil rights to all.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I would be happy to take any questions.