

## Committees

Finance  
Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education  
Health, Ranking Member  
Rules & Reference  
Joint Medicaid Oversight Committee  
Joint Legislative Ethics Committee

**13<sup>th</sup> District**  
City of Lakewood  
Parts of Cleveland's West Side  
Wards 3, 14, 15, 16, & 17  
(614) 466-5921  
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### **State Representative Nickie J. Antonio** **District 13**

Sponsor Testimony HB 160  
Government Accountability and Oversight Committee  
June 7, 2017

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide Sponsor testimony on House Bill 160-the Ohio Fairness Act 2017. The Fairness Act is a simple bill that updates the Ohio Civil Rights law by adding Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity to those already protected in housing, employment and the public sphere. It also upholds all existing religious exemptions under the Ohio Civil Rights Law. It is a fair proposal that will simply give people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender the same freedom to work, the same freedom to live where they choose, and the same full equal participation in society, just as anyone else in Ohio. It has been over 50 years since we have updated the Civil Rights Act. And for the estimated 300,000 LGBT Ohioans, fairness is long overdue.

“All Ohioans, including those from the LGBT community, should have the chance to get ahead and be full and complete citizens with the protections and promise of liberty and the right to take care of their families. They should not have to fear that they’ll be evicted from their home based on their gender identity, or fired from their job based upon whom they love. The basic fairness protections offered with this bill signal that Ohio wants to be competitive and move forward into the future.

Ohio is one of 28 states that do not have clear non-discrimination protections for members of the LGBTQ community, however 16 cities have passed fully inclusive non-discrimination ordinances.

The idea of Fairness and Inclusion is not new to our country nor to Ohio consider the following:

- More than 615 of fortune 500 companies across the country, and over 60 top companies in Ohio including Limited Brands, Progressive, Proctor + Gamble and Bob Evans (to name a few) demonstrate support of discrimination free workplaces through the provision of policies that create work environments that include civil rights protections extended to LGBT employees. Eaton Corp., Huntington National Bank, and Sherwin Williams are among major Cleveland Employers that belong to **Ohio Business Competes Coalition**, which supports updating Ohio law to ban LGBT discrimination. These companies understand that this is a talent-recruitment, economic development and jobs issue.
- 12 of Ohio's four year universities have similar policies including Ohio State University, Youngstown State University, Cleveland State University and Shawnee State University.
- An executive order establishing an anti-discrimination policy in state government employment which includes sexual orientation stands in the Governor's Administration.
- The Ohio House of Representatives, an Equal Opportunity Employer, also prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation.
- 21 states and the District of Columbia have banned discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity (6 states have sexual orientation only discrimination bans)

If we are to make Ohio competitive and appealing to top employers across the state and recruit from across the country, to attract and keep a skilled creative workforce Ohio should protect her workers and join the 21st century! Some of Ohio's top companies embrace LGBT equality because they know it is good for business and that is good for Ohio's economy. It also happens to be the right thing to do.

There was a Nike commercial prominently played during the super bowl, featuring northeast Ohio's own Lebron James, with the tag line "equality should have no boundaries" - "opportunity should not discriminate" - "If we can be equals here" (

meaning the sports arena)- “we can be equals everywhere”. It’s time that Ohio level the playing field for members of the LGBT community.

A recent Plain Dealer editorial from May 19, 2017 declared that Ohio should close the loophole that permits LGBT discrimination in Ohio, that the measure is long overdue and should be non-partisan. I agree with all of the above and I hope members of this committee will agree as well.

Hard working Ohioans who are also members of the LGBT community contribute every day to the health and wellbeing of our state. We work, we worship, we pay our taxes, we send our children to school, we attend school, we are civically engaged in our communities. We represent our communities on city councils, school boards, county council boards and yes we serve even as State Representative and on days such as this, introduce legislation, testify in committees and work for the ideals of fairness and equity for all Ohio Citizens.

No one should be denied access to a home and all that comes with that responsibility, no one should live in fear of losing their job, or be denied the right to pursue a career and be a contributing member of society. All citizens should enjoy the ability to participate in one’s own community without discrimination. In the words of our pledge of allegiance, “with liberty and justice for all”- not some, but “for all”. These civil rights are the fundamental building blocks of our American dream and Ohio has the opportunity through this proposed legislation to provide equal treatment for all of Ohio’s citizens to live, work and recreate in our state.

I believe that every person deserves these fundamental protections in order to fully participate in our society free from fear, harassment and discrimination. We have the opportunity to make this a reality with HB 160 to communicate to the world that Ohio is open for business. This is not a Democrat or Republican issue- this is an issue of fairness and equity and a bright future for the people of Ohio, all the people of Ohio.

I leave you with the wise words of Coretta Scott King:

We have work to do in our common struggle against bigotry and discrimination. I say “common struggle” because I believe very strongly that all forms of bigotry and discrimination are equally wrong and should be opposed by right-thinking Americans everywhere. Freedom from discrimination based on sexual orientation is

surely a fundamental human right in any great democracy, as much as freedom from racial, religious, gender, or ethnic discrimination.” ~ Coretta Scott King

I am happy to answer any questions from the committee.

# Ohio Fairness Act

Update non-discrimination laws to include sexual orientation and gender identity

Ohio is one of



28 states

without clear, inclusive, non-discrimination protections for the LGBT community



14 Ohio cities already have passed fully inclusive non-discrimination ordinances

Source: [http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/non\\_discrimination\\_laws](http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/non_discrimination_laws) Source: Equality Ohio

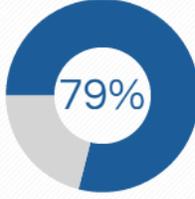
## Ohio's LGBT community



Over 300,000 Ohioans identify as LGBT



Ohio is home to the 6th largest LGBT population in the U.S.



79% of Ohioans favor adding LGBT protections to equal housing laws

Popul. sources: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/160517/lgbt-percentage-highest-lowest-north-dakota.aspx>; US Census Bureau Image: <http://www.gbtnt.ala.org/news/archives/2012> Source: <http://www.equalityohio.org/ehed/>

## Top companies embrace LGBT equality



Ohio's top employers earned high marks in the 2015 Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equality Index. 13 received perfect scores.



80 of the 98 top employers in Ohio have corporate policies that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation

Source: <http://www.hrc.org/campaigns/corporate-equality-index> Source: [http://www.cleveland.com/business/index.ssf/2015/07/discrimination\\_against\\_gays\\_le\\_1.html](http://www.cleveland.com/business/index.ssf/2015/07/discrimination_against_gays_le_1.html)

To compete for jobs and grow our economy, we MUST ensure equality regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity