

January 23,2018

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking Minority Member Clyde, and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, thank you for your service to the State of Ohio and for the opportunity to bring testimony this day. I am here to speak in support of HB 160.

My name is Allan Debelak. I am a retired pastor from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America - serving in Columbus for close to thirty years.

During my tenure at Redeemer Lutheran Church, we became the first ELCA congregation in Ohio to make sure that our LGBTQ fellow saints would have - without qualification - a congregation in which they could exercise their lives of faith on all levels of our ministry and mission - that was in 1992.

In December 2015, during my last month as pastor of Redeemer, I presided at the marriage of a lesbian couple and then, later that month on a vibrant Sunday morning, I walked with this same couple and their children as we stepped up to the baptismal font and led the community into and through a rite of re-naming and blessing as one of them completed the long-awaited transition of gender reassignment and the recognition of that new life within the body of the Church.

This couple was already welcome within the congregation. And yet, we all know that a simple '*All Are Welcome*' sign or statement on a place of worship very often doesn't carry the substance or worth it attempts to proclaim. Rather, substance comes when the people of congregation insist that a welcome is to be embodied by acts of vulnerability and availability within the whole community that will secure the well-being of all who dare take us at our words.

The Church uses many words and images that are meant to shape a life that shows no partiality.

I support HB 160 because a just society that seeks the well-being of all must never flinch as it lives into the words of our Republic - word that point us to a life in which all are **created equal**, **freedom-for-all** shapes the day at hand, and the **brave** risk to make the homes and daily lives of all people safe from the precarious nature of a society that can easily be ruled by fear. For when any one among us faces the day anxious about whether or not we can live and thrive and fully participated in the life that is granted to all citizens, our grand, cultural words are cheapened and that which could be great about America is left to be that which is an illusion.

I support HB 160 because I want my LGBTQ brothers and sisters to live with the freedoms and protections that are so routine and normal and expected in my life - that my wife and I can move about town, run a business, take vacations, own property, and do all of that - without a bit of anxiety about how any part of it could ever be denied to us simply for being who we are.

I support HB 160 because I admire people who tell the truth and then live as though such an open and honest way of living with others is essential to building a creative and just community. When we do not live into the truthfulness of our words that are meant for all citizens, some people are left out - some people are held to different standards - some people are objectified and their relationships and civic character are somehow deemed worth less than others. Unfortunately, it is then that we the people settle for the sacred violence of a culture that sews division and thrives on scapegoating. I think the days of our cultural violence against our LGBTQ neighbors must be put behind us for the good of all..

**Again, thank you for your service.**