

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Minority Member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Alecia Jarvis and I am here today to give a face to the transgender youth here in Ohio that need to be told they are important, valued, and loved. You have the power to send that message to ALL LGBTQ people in Ohio by passing House Bill 160.

I am 14 years old and in the 8th grade. I came out over 1 & ½ years ago when I was 12. As a young transgender woman myself, I have experienced first-hand the bullying and harassment that is all too common for LGBTQ youth. It has been hard at times, but I am proud of who I am and I refuse to let anyone take that away from me!

While I have been lucky to have the love and support of family and friends, that is not the case for many transgender kids. Transgender youth face more obstacles than other kids because they may be rejected by family or friends and discriminated against by others.

This results in some sad and shocking statistics.

- The number of transgender youth in the United States is approximately 350,000.
- About 70,000 of those kids are homeless.
- 40% of Transgender kids will attempt suicide at least once.
- Because of harassment, bullying, assaults and discrimination at schools:
  - 75% of transgender students feel unsafe at school.
  - Because of that we have more absences, get lower grades and are more likely to drop out of school.

We are just like any other American, any other Ohioan, any other kids. Like everyone else, we deserve the same rights and protection as everyone else. For example; using the restroom or ordering a wedding cake are simple tasks for most people, but not if you are transgender. Suddenly, you are accused of being a pervert for simply needing to go to the bathroom, or a baker has the right to refuse to help you.

Decades ago, we said it wasn't ok to discriminate based on race, religion, gender, etc. it is time to add sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression to that list. We should not have to feel ashamed or afraid for being ourselves. We should be able to safely go to school, ride the bus, see a doctor, buy a car, rent an apartment or get and keep a job.

Please say that every person in Ohio matters, regardless of race, religion, gender, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Please vote yes on House Bill 160, the Ohio Fairness Act and say that I, Alecia, matter.

Thank you.