

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Minority Member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee:

My name is Claire Gauntner, and I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 160.

I grew up in Cleveland. Even when I lived in other cities across the country, I knew that Ohio had my heart. In 2014, my partner and I moved to Cleveland thinking we could settle down in Ohio and raise our family here. I am the mother of a 5 month old daughter and the wife of a loving spouse named Elizabeth. I work a fulltime job at a nonprofit in Cleveland.

Since having my daughter, I am increasingly aware of the importance of my job in the context of my life. I go to work every day so that I can provide stability and opportunity for my family. My paychecks help buy groceries and pay for our mortgage. My health insurance paid for my baby's stay in the NICU and allows us to see a doctor regularly. My job provides stability for my family. Unfortunately, I also go to work every day knowing that my employer can legally fire me on the spot simply because I am not heterosexual. In the state of Ohio, my relationship with the person I love—something that has nothing to do with how I excel in my work—is reason enough for me to be fired.

Let me say that again: my healthy, loving marriage is reason enough for me to lose my job, risking the stability of my family. Risking the groceries, risking the mortgage, risking opportunities for my infant daughter.

Luckily, Ohio businesses overwhelmingly support nondiscrimination policies. More than 150 businesses have signed on to Ohio Business Competes because policies protecting LGBTQ people from discrimination aren't just good for families, they are good for business. But it shouldn't be optional for me and my family to be treated fairly or not.

My daughter is too young to know that the state of Ohio treats her parents differently than other parents. I hope that this bill will be passed soon so that she doesn't ever need to know that.

The Ohio Fairness Act is about treating everyone equally. It protects families like mine from discrimination. I choose to call Ohio home because I thought it would be a good place to raise my family. I urge you to pass House Bill 160 to protect my family and to help ensure that all Ohioans are treated fairly.

I would be happy to speak with you or answer any questions about my experience.