

## **Testimony of Cynthia Vermillion, Resident of Hilliard, Ohio, for the Ohio House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee Hearing on HB160.**

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

I am the proud mother of four wonderful children. They range in ages from 16 to 24. My husband of over 26 years and I raised our children in a conservative Christian home filled with lots of love and laughter. We regularly read scriptures together, we prayed daily as a family, and we always attended our 3 hour block of Sunday meetings. We love Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and worked diligently to instill that love and a deep understanding of the Gospel into our children. "A New Commandment I Give unto you...that you love one another." This is the greatest of Christ's commandments and we taught our children that loving and caring about other people is a huge part of following Jesus Christ.

I mention this as background so that you will understand that many, many LGBTQ kids are raised in believing and loving families. Often these families have taught their children that God intends for marriage to be only between one man and one woman. In our home, I made sure we only watched appropriate movies, used nice words (even the use of "stupid" was forbidden), and listened to good music. Computer time was carefully monitored as well.

Understanding all of this, I would like to share my deeply personal, heartfelt, and very spiritual journey as a parent of two beautiful daughters who identify as LGBTQ. Sarah, my now 21 year old, first told me she had a crush on a girl on her cross country team when she was a junior in high school. I took it in stride, thinking it was a girl crush or a phase. Later, when she was a freshman at Vassar College in New York, she let us know that she identifies as a Lesbian. We always supported this loving, fun, but emotionally fragile daughter. She did not know that for the next year, I cried every morning when I knelt to say my heartfelt prayer to my Father in Heaven. I never asked Him to change her. I didn't feel that was the right thing to pray for. Instead, my answer was to just love her and continue doing what is right. After much study and prayer, I feel that what is right is to support my daughters 100% in their lives, including allowing them to fully be the people they were created to be.

My younger daughter is a sophomore in high school. She knew much earlier that she identified as LGBTQ. She didn't know about Sarah when she realized she identified as such. She is a spunky, creative girl and also knows that we support her 100%. Before she came out to us, she suffered from feelings of self loathing and started to self harm.

We ended up at the doctor's office and therapy. She did not, however, turn the corner until she understood that we love her just the way she is.

Both she and Sarah are thrilled that I have become very involved in PFLAG. For the year 2018, I will serve as Vice President of the Board. I also call myself a "Mama Bear." This term is used by mothers of LGBTQ kids who love their children with all their hearts and will protect them from harm just as a Mama Bear would do. I will protect them just as any of you parents would protect your children. And I am here to tell you how important it is to provide legal protection for my two beautiful daughters. Everyone is someone's child. My heart breaks to think of my happy Sarah or Madeline excitedly picking out their wedding gowns or wedding cakes, only to be told by the proprietor that "they won't serve their kind." And, why? Because to them, my daughters are nothing but an "abomination," "a sinner," or "evil." My daughters are not an abomination. They are daughters of God. They deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. We cannot count on business owners to do the right thing. We have a history of businesses turning away people for discriminatory reasons. That is why HB 160 is so important. It will help eliminate the arbitrary and capricious use of "religious freedom" to hurt people like my Sarah and Madeline. I ask each of you: What would Jesus do? Thank you.