

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Darius Stubbs, and I am in support of this legislation, HB 160, which is being considered. I am a poet, a teacher and an advocate. Though I was not born in Ohio, it has been my home for 29 years, ever since I was four years old. I am here today to say something that is really quite simple: No Ohioan, no American, should have to be afraid to lose their home, their employment or be refused the use of public amenities because of who they are or who they love. I am lucky enough to live in and make my living in the city of Cleveland where there are protections for people like me. In fact, there are 20 cities in the state where I, as a Transgender man, would have protection from housing and employment discrimination but that protection is inconsistent across the state. I could live in my hometown, Youngstown, and be protected against discrimination but drive to work 10 minutes North in Niles or Howland or Warren and lose my job based on my boss' personal prejudices. If I worked in Niles or Warren or Howland or Newton Falls, I could legally be fired for who I am because the state of Ohio has no protections for me in regards to my gender or sexual orientation. That discrepancy lays bare a disturbing implication. That discrepancy between the 247 municipalities in Ohio implies that we live in a state where certain people are undeserving of basic human and civil rights. Implies that we live in a state of us-es and thems. That we live in a state backward facing, divided and determined to stay that way. I don't think that anyone in this room wants that. I certainly don't want to live in a state that is not determined to protect all of its citizens from discrimination.

All Ohioans, Transgender or not, Gay, lesbian, bisexual or not, have the human right to make a living and make a life for themselves. How can anyone make a happy, healthy and fulfilling life for themselves when they know that they are not protected from discrimination in the state that they call home? I want to live in a state that has the compassion, empathy and common sense to acknowledge that we are all, transgender or not, human beings and all human beings who live in Ohio deserve equal protection under the law, transgender or not. A vote in support of HB 160 is a vote for civil rights. It is a vote for the real and lived equality of every citizen of this state.