



December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee,

My name is Douglas Berger, co-chair of the Secular Coalition for Ohio, and I am writing today in support of House Bill 160. It will increase equality for all Ohioans.

I don't know any rational person who would be against equality. Although many of us were raised to treat others how we wish to be treated, we know why we have laws and regulations to protect people who have been historically marginalized and discriminated against.

It is shocking today to think that even 50 years ago, women struggled to gain financial independence. What would disabled people from the past think of all the accommodations made today so people of **all abilities** can participate as equal members of the community? There is still a lot of work needed to be done to improve equality for LGBTQA people.

If some members of the committee have concerns about the financial costs of this bill, I urge you to also consider the financial costs to the state if we exclude any marginalized group from equal protection. Companies want the best talent and they don't like a business environment that encourages discrimination.

The Secular Coalition for Ohio doesn't believe laws or regulations should be based on the religious beliefs of the legislators. To have sound equality, we must base laws and regulations on sound scientific principles and real evidence. Not on raw, often biased emotions.

House Bill 160 doesn't force religious people to stop believing what they believe. It won't force priests to marry same-sex couples. It doesn't change the exemptions for ministers and churches. The bill would only increase the equality that most Ohioans enjoy today. LGBTQA people are people you see everyday. They may even be your friends and neighbors. They deserve to be protected from discrimination by the passage of HB 160.

Aristotle once wrote: *"Democracy arises out of the notion that those who are equal in any respect are equal in all respects..."*

Ohio could get closer to having a real democracy by passing HB 160.

Thank you for your time,

Douglas Berger, Co-chair Secular Coalition for Ohio