

To the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee:

My name is Dylan Yépez, and I write in support of the Ohio Fairness Act, House Bill 160. I make this testimony in my personal capacity and do not speak for my employer, although I reference my employer by name herein.

I was born and raised in Shaker Heights, an East-side suburb of Cleveland. I received my juris doctor from Georgetown University in May 2017, then returned to Ohio with my husband to join a large, multinational law firm. Despite the love I feel for my hometown, the decision to return was vexing.

In August 2016, having just finished my second summer of law school, I received an offer to join the Cleveland office of Squire Patton Boggs (“Squire”) upon graduation. I had always dreamed of becoming an attorney, and I welcomed the opportunity to return to my hometown. But this decision wasn’t about only me.

When I received the job offer, my husband and I had just celebrated our second anniversary. Moving to Cleveland would require that he leave his job in Washington, D.C., and rely on my income for our livelihood. For the first time, I became acutely aware that we were considering leaving a place that treated us with dignity and moving to a place that would not even provide us legal recourse if we suffered discrimination in employment, housing, or public accommodations because we are gay.

Would I lose my job because I’m gay? Would we find a landlord willing to rent to a gay couple? Would our doctor refuse us emergency medical treatment if we got into an accident?

Ultimately, the answers to these questions are immaterial. What matters is this: as a gay couple in Ohio, we live with these uncertainties every day.

My husband and I are fortunate. We enjoy the unwavering support of our family residing in the Cleveland suburbs. And Squire, the law firm that drew me back to my hometown, is an outspoken proponent of equality and a longtime member of Ohio Business Competes.

Without the safety net of a loving family and an unprejudiced employer, however, we would certainly not have returned to Ohio. Frankly, in the absence of strong family ties, I cannot imagine what attracts LGBT professionals to this state. In moving here, we risk everything.

HB160 is about basic human dignity. Its passage would signal not only that Ohio is open to everyone, but also that Ohio values everyone. In deciding whether to relocate to Ohio, LGBT professionals would no longer have to weigh the risk of suffering indignities, or something worse. And LGBT professionals who already reside here could finally live without the constant stress of uncertainty.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Dylan J. Yépez