



Testimony of Alesha Washington
Vice President – Government Advocacy
Greater Cleveland Partnership

House Government, Accountability and Oversight Committee
House Bill 160
January 31, 2018

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking member Clyde and members of the Committee. My name is Alesha Washington and I am the Vice President of Government Advocacy for the Greater Cleveland Partnership. On behalf of our member companies, I am pleased to offer our support of House Bill 160 – the Ohio Fairness Act. This is long overdue legislation that would add gender identity and sexual orientation to the list of protected classes in Ohio’s Civil Rights laws and other relevant sections of the Ohio Revised Code.

GCP is the largest chamber of commerce in the State of Ohio representing more than 9,000 small, mid-market and large companies across Northeast Ohio. Our mission is to mobilize private sector leadership, expertise and resources to create jobs and leverage investment to improve the economic vitality of our region. We do that in many ways, including working with our members and community partners on workforce development strategies to attract the workforce that will further economic growth in Northeast Ohio and the state.

This focus led to GCP joining Ohio Business Competes, a non-partisan coalition of more than 200 companies and organizations – including GCP member companies like Eaton, Sherwin-Williams and KeyBank – that support statewide protections for the lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual and queer community. For our members this is a key talent and economic issue – Ohio cannot truly be competitive in attracting the best and brightest if basic civil rights are not available for *all* current and future employees.

Many of our members – and GCP – have company policies in place that provide protections for LGBTQ workers. Municipalities across the state – including Cleveland, Cincinnati and Columbus – have passed non-discrimination ordinances and protections for the LGBTQ community for housing, employment and public accommodations. Moreover, we have witnessed the national impact when states take an antiquated view of this issue. Data from Ohio Business Competes highlights that, based on estimates from the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, the Georgia hotel and meetings industry would have been negatively impacted by a \$600 million loss over five years if anti-LGBT legislation had been signed into state law.

All of this adds to the momentum of this being the time that the Ohio legislature must act to ensure that the basic civil rights of all Ohioans are protected. This is a critical part of the work we must do to create the economic conditions for our state, and its residents, to thrive.

We urge your passage of House Bill 160. Thank you for your consideration.