

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Minority Member Clyde, and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 160. My name is Holly Gross and I am Vice President of Government Relations for the Columbus Chamber of Commerce.

Founded in 1884, the Columbus Chamber is the leading voice of business within the 11-county Columbus Region (Franklin, Delaware, Union, Fairfield, Licking, Knox, Logan, Madison, Morrow, Marion, Pickaway), representing more than 1,500 members employing over 500,000 workers across all industry sectors.

Ensuring a predictable regulatory environment that will allow our members to operate efficiently and succeed in a competitive business climate is a primary principle of the Columbus Chamber's Public Policy Agenda, which also states our support for policies to attract and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce.

That's why Columbus was proud to lead the way as Ohio's first major metropolitan chamber to join Ohio Business Competes (OBC), a non-partisan coalition of businesses committed to achieving nondiscrimination policies at the state level. In determining whether to make this issue a legislative priority, our Chamber conducted a robust vetting process through our Government Affairs Steering Committee, who felt it was important to also obtain a vote of the Small Business Council. After recommendations from both authorities, the measure was approved by our full board of directors.

Ohio's top employers share Ohio Business Competes' inclusive values. Of the OBC members, we are thrilled to report that more than a third call Central Ohio home, are represented on our board and committees, and already have inclusive and nondiscrimination policies in place. We hope that raising awareness of the cultural and economic benefits of this issue will encourage more companies to follow their lead, especially because businesses overwhelmingly report that such policies cost next to nothing and help drive a competitive edge. However, until these protections are ubiquitous in the workplace and in society, Ohio should join the 22 other states that have enacted laws to ensure employees and consumers are protected from being denied jobs, housing and services based upon perceived sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.

H.B. 160 adds "sexual orientation" and "gender identity or expression" to the covered characteristics that can be the basis for unlawful discriminatory practices included in Ohio's existing civil rights statute and other provisions of current law (race, color, religion, age, sex, familial status, marital status, military status, national origin, ancestry, and disability). Under the bill, an employer may not limit, segregate, or classify its employees or job applicants in any way

that would deprive an individual of employment or otherwise adversely affect the status of the individual as an employee because of their sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. It also adds protections in cases of public accommodation, housing, lending and credit reporting, and within educational institutions.

The Columbus Chamber and our members recognize and value the power of diversity. We are committed to helping all of Central Ohio thrive, which includes anyone that has faced barriers in trying to live, work, or otherwise flourish here. According to a 2015 Gallup poll, Greater Columbus is home to the 15th largest LGBTQ population in the country.¹ We believe the absence of statewide anti-discrimination protections puts our region and our state at a disadvantage. H.B. 160 will help to retain talented LGBTQ workers that wish to remain and feel welcome, attract the best and brightest, increase workplace diversity, strengthen relationships among businesses and consumers, and ultimately grow Ohio's economy. The legislation will also serve as another tool for Ohio to use as we compete on a national level for mega economic development projects and as forward-thinking businesses seek to invest in Ohio.

Furthermore, the Columbus Chamber opposes varied local ordinances that create a patchwork of regulations that are complicated and difficult for businesses operating in multiple jurisdictions to comply with. While the City of Columbus is one of 19 municipalities that have already enacted these nondiscrimination protections, we support one uniform statewide statute that will provide greater clarity and consistency for our members, especially those operating across multiple jurisdictions.

For the aforementioned reasons, the Columbus Chamber urges your support of the legislation and encourages this committee to advance H.B. 160.

Thank you for your consideration, and I am happy to answer any questions you have.

¹ <http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2015/03/23/gallup-poll.html>