

Proponent Testimony  
House Bill 160  
The Rev. James Waugh

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Minority Member Clyde, and members of the House Government Accountability Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB160.

Hello. My name is Rev. James Waugh. I am here today to speak briefly in support of HB160. As a retired United Methodist pastor, I have had the opportunity to serve local congregations situated in various locations across the state of Ohio, including: Darke County, Auglaize County, Washington County, and Franklin County. In addition, I have had the opportunity to serve at the administrative level of the church as a district superintendent in eight counties in southeast Ohio and as an assistant to the superintendent in five counties in central Ohio.

As a pastor, as a United Methodist, and as a follower of Jesus Christ, I come before you today to seek your support for the inclusion of the categories of gender identity and sexual orientation among the categories of persons to receive protection from discrimination in the state of Ohio.

While we in the United Methodist Church may continue to struggle with our understandings of LGBT persons and gender identity issues, I believe our understandings are clear that we see all persons, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, as children of God. And as such, these persons need protection from discrimination in our state. The Social Principles of the United Methodist declare, "Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due to all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for all persons, regardless of sexual orientation."

As a pastor and as a disciple of Jesus Christ, I operate out of the ethic that Jesus taught that we are to love God and to love our neighbors. For me, that includes our LGBT neighbors.

I realize there are those who fear that this law might constrain their ability to teach otherwise by interpreting the Bible in ways that speak against LGBT persons. However, this legislation is about striking a balance. Our civil rights history is about this balance. Businesses that are open to the public should be open to everyone on the same terms, including to customers who are gay or transgender. Protecting people from discrimination, including people who are gay or transgender, is about treating others as we want to be treated. However, in the interest of balance, this bill includes a standard religious exemption ensuring that religious institutions will continue to enjoy their constitutionally protected right to freedom of religion.

Personally, I long for the day when we come to a place in our culture and in the church where we see LGBT persons as our neighbors, companions on the faith journey, and as full participants in the church and in the society, but I know we are not there yet.

Unfortunately, one's gender identity or one's sexual orientation can still cause them to become the target of discrimination in housing, employment, and other areas. And until we see the day arrive when we can all get along with each other without these protections, I believe it is incumbent on the state to put in place measures to protect these persons.

Our oldest daughter is a lesbian. She and her partner live in Oregon. In looking at the literature regarding these laws, I see that Oregon is one of the states that has put these protections in place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons. I come before you today to ask you to include protections for gender identity and sexual orientation for sons and daughters such as mine in the state of Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to offer these comments.