

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Minority Member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee: my name is Jason Rudman and I am here to support House Bill 160 – the Ohio Fairness Act.

I am a father of two young children and a husband. I've been married for 7 years and partnered for nearly 20 years. I relocated to Ohio from Manhattan with my husband three and a half years ago to accept an amazing job as a senior leader for a Fortune 500 company headquartered in Cleveland. Although I moved to Ohio in pursuit of an incredible professional opportunity, it was not an easy decision for my husband and me to make, and we strongly considered instead moving to the Bay Area or Seattle.

One of our chief concerns was that in 2014, Ohio did not have equal protections for the LGBTQ community in employment, housing and public accommodations. Unfortunately, the situation remains the same today.

However, my family and I felt comfortable making the move to Ohio because I work for an employer who emphasizes inclusion and celebrates diversity. We also live in a city, Cleveland, where there are local ordinances to ensure equality and legal protection against discrimination. Cleveland was able to effectively compete with Seattle and the Bay Area to bring my professional experience and my family here to Ohio. We were made to feel welcome.

My family represents just one of the many instances in which talented and civic-minded individuals are willing to move and positively contribute to communities that embrace them. Cities and states that *win* are those that attract and retain the best talent. In this increasingly mobile economy, LGBTQ talent has many options and will undoubtedly consider the way they will be treated by law as a significant factor in determining where to live and work.

However, here is the reality: my family could travel to a different part of Ohio and be denied access to public accommodations, regardless of my position as a senior leader at a Fortune 500 company or my status as a community member and property owner in Cleveland. For example, a hotel could choose to not do business with my husband or me, leaving our family without a place to stay. A gas station could render us stranded by refusing gas. This is the reality today for LGBTQ people in Ohio.

HB160 is simply about fairness and equal protection. It is purely about being afforded the same access as everyone else, thereby leveling the playing field. Even more than that, this issue is deeply personal. As my husband and I take on the task of raising our kids, it becomes a matter of dignity and self-worth; the power to be your authentic self at your place of work, where you live, and when you choose to take advantage of public accommodations.

I urge you to pass House Bill 160 into law. Thank you for your time, and I am willing to answer questions.