

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Jordan Bernas, I go by he/him, and I am speaking in support of HB160.

I consider myself a pretty ordinary person in their mid-twenties. I use the word “doggo” a lot, I like to play board games with hard to pronounce characters, and I spend a lot of time in coffeeshops. Much like other young people, I am also job hunting. Where I might be different, however, is that instead of researching the amenities that an employer might provide, I do dogged research on what county they are in and what type of non-discrimination ordinance exists in whichever city that employer calls home. If I’m lucky, that city has the protections necessary to allow me to go into an interview and tell my potential employer that I’m a man. If I am not, chances are good that I will not be applying for that job.

I have been burned before by an employer who, upon learning that I am a trans man, suddenly remembered that the position had already been filled. In another case, once my employer found out I was dating a woman, I was told that my values didn’t match the organization I was working for. Now I am wary. Without equal protections statewide, job hunting for LGBTQ+ individuals is a minefield.

Apartment hunting, already not the most exciting mission, becomes a question of whether to refer to your long-term partner as your roommate, if you have to live in an area with no protections. I would say that most people I meet are surprised to learn about the lack of protection for LGBTQ+ people statewide. Many assume that, of course we shouldn’t discriminate against gay people or trans people. Who someone loves or the pronouns someone uses has no effect on their job ability or how good of a tenant they might be. Yet the law as it stands in Ohio does not seem to agree.

I support HB160 because people have the right to live and work where they want without the prejudice of others upending their lives. I feel lucky that I live in Columbus, a city that recognizes my humanity enough to allow protections. But there are people in the state of Ohio forced to hide their identities or never discuss their loved ones for fear of reprisals. This is unacceptable. Supporting HB160 means supporting everyone in Ohio, not just a portion.

Every day in this city I see neighbors helping neighbors and the general Midwestern kindness that initially drew me to settle here with my fiancé, with dreams of raising a family. What HB160 provides is protection for so many who do not have the opportunity to follow their own dreams because of prejudice. There will always be people who treat others poorly because of a lack of understanding, but I believe that one of the roles of government is to protect its citizens against this type of discrimination. That is what I am asking the committee to do here today. Thank you for your attention and the chance to speak about this topic. I am willing to answer any questions you may have.

