

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Minority Member Clyde, and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, I would like to thank you all for considering this bill, HB 160, as a way to ensure that all Ohioans are treated with equal dignity and fairness.

I am here representing the church I serve in Cleveland Heights and I appear from my own sense of ministry and safety.

I am a Unitarian Universalist minister, and as such my life as an openly gay person is pretty well protected. Because our faith calls us to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person, I don't have to worry about being fired from my job for being gay. Nor does my husband and colleague in ministry, the Rev. Denis Letourneau Paul, minister of the East Shore Unitarian Universalist Church in Kirtland.

We moved to Ohio 4 years ago to accept two ministries, even though at the time we knew we could not be married in this State. We knew that though Ohio has a long record of presidents, and has, in every presidential election voted for the eventual winner of that race.

We also moved here believing in the basic goodness of Ohioans. Perhaps it was my growing up in Michigan with your "Oh Hi! Oh!" commercials that helped draw me here.

I've come to you to ask you to encourage fairness for all of us living in Ohio.

Though I, in my bubble, feel very safe as I own my own home, and have a job where my homosexuality is seen as valid as heterosexuality, I know there are many others who are not as safe as I am.

It is for them that I appear here today.

Part of the function of a democracy, and a good government, is to protect the rights of those of whom have been historically marginalized. Though we're founded on the loft ideals that "all men are created equal," we have spent the 242 years trying to manifest the words that my fellow Unitarian and 3rd President of our nation penned in the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson.

Though not yet articulated, you can easily see how "the inherent worth and dignity of every person," has a directed theological and philosophical connection to "all men are created equal."

It has taken bold and brave legislatures, such as yourself, 242 years of struggle and compromise to bring us this far. I hope that you will continue to carry the mantel of equality for all into your deliberations and eventual passing of HB 160.

After all, we in Ohio believe in fairness, don't we? We deserve equal protection under the law, just as we pay equal taxes to our civic institutions.

After all, people of the Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Transgender and Queer communities don't get a discount on our taxes because we don't enjoy the same legal protections in our home state. We pay the same as everyone else.

Please continue to do what your colleagues have been doing in Ohio since 1803, strive to make this the best state to live a life of liberty and make a the pursuit of happiness not only possible, but more likely.

Thank you very much for your time.