

HB 160 Testimony – Justin A. Leonti

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Justin Leonti, a member of the Akron United Coalition, the chair of the Economic Justice committee of the Summit County Progressive Democrats PAC, and most importantly, a business owner from Green. I love Ohio and I always wish to see this state prosper but we need to be cognizant of some startling facts and statistics about our state. Ohio almost leads the highest unemployment rate in the nation, with only 6 other states having a higher unemployment rate than ours. Since 2000, Ohio has seen 442,958 private sector jobs leave 61 of our 88 counties. And 15.4% of our fellow Ohioans are living under the federal poverty level. With facts and statistics like these it is not surprising to think that large private companies are favoring states like California, New York, and Georgia over Ohio. And while the bill before you does not directly seek to fix these immediate problems it certainly gives Ohio an edge in the right direction. Now more than ever Ohio needs to be leading the forefront against other states in gaining employment through large companies.

When companies look where to locate themselves they often have several litmus tests to ensure the state is the perfect fit. Leading those tests is the knowledge that their employee base will feel welcomed, safe, and have access to accommodations. With the passage of HB 160 it will certainly send the message that any person who chooses to work in the great state of Ohio is welcomed and protected by law. By passing HB 160 it will alleviate any concerns an employer may have of the safety and security of their employees. It will show employers and the entire nation that Ohio is willing to accept any person that is willing to work hard and contribute to the American dream.

This bill simply put, ensures equality for our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender citizens. It provides an opportunity for every Ohioan to feel safe in their employment, housing, and public accommodations. This bill does not provide any special treatment but rather follows the words outlined in our own constitution that “all men are created equal”.

I fully support House Bill 160. I don't know about any of you, but when I was a little boy, my parents repeatedly promised me something. They repeatedly promised me that I could be anything I wanted in life as long as I put my mind to it and I worked hard for it. And so, because of this promise, I went through my childhood thinking exactly that: I could be anything I wanted, and nobody could stop me. Well I know now that isn't necessarily true. Unfortunately, there are circumstances and instances when individuals in this state and across the nation are discriminated against because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. If we stand together now and pass HB 160, Ohio will send a message to the nation. Ohio will keep my parent's promise that you can be anything you want as long as you put your mind to it and work hard for it.

After all, Ohio is the heart of it all. And when businesses succeed, Ohioans succeed. We need to ensure every Ohioan is safe and proud to call this state their home. I thank you all for your time and consideration and hope you will vote in favor of HB 160.

Thank you,



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