

Requested Testimony- Kei Graves

January 21, 2018

HB 160

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Kei Graves, and I am a transgender, queer, person of color. During this written testimony I am selecting to represent myself and others who are members of the LGBTQ+ Community and would benefit greatly from the passing of the HB 160 that is being considered.

I have been fortunate during my employment and housing history to work and reside in places that are inclusive and welcoming. Other Ohioans may not be as fortunate. I am well aware that as a state we do not have blanket protections for the LGBTQ+ community as we do for other groups, leaving it at a person's discretion how they will react or respond in the case that someone should come out at work, to their landlord, or otherwise. These are opportunities for discrimination to take place. I have heard the stories of queer individuals in Lorain and Cuyahoga County, where I work and live, respectively, who have had negative experiences and lost jobs, housing, or experienced other negative ramifications for merely being themselves.

The passing of HB 160 would make it illegal for a person to be discriminated against purely because of who they love or how they identify. I know for a fact that discrimination harms Ohio on both a personal and economic level. The Center for American Progress estimates the national cost of workplace discrimination is \$64 billion annually. This is a massive cost for businesses to replace more than 2 million Americans who leave their jobs because of workplace discrimination. Fairness, love, family, and stability are all excellent reasons to ensure that nondiscrimination legislation and marriage equality are a reality for all Ohioans. But we must not lose sight of economic sensibilities. To prevent these losses means to have comprehensive laws that protect and reflect all Ohioans.

Once again, it has been my fortune to work for businesses who already have clauses in their anti-discrimination policies that protect sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. Knowing that individuals in the queer community could face the loss of employment, housing, or other essentials that allow for them to pursue their life, liberty, and happiness purely for something they cannot change is heart-wrenching. Additionally, I believe that it goes against what we as a state want to portray to the rest of the nation. One of my constituents on a non-profit board that I chair just stated that she and her partner left Ohio with no intention of returning for years because Ohio does not protect LGBTQ+ individuals. Now, they are back in the state and are honestly afraid to be out despite their loving

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relationship of sixteen years. Another example I can provide includes college-age students who I work with, many of whom are fearful where they work and where they live to be out because of the fear of discrimination and the lack of inclusive state policies that could protect them. I believe that with the passing of HB 160, some of these concerns for the LGBTQ+ community will be mitigated, marking Ohio as a safe and welcoming state.

I appreciate the committee taking the time to review this written testimony and would be happy to provide more information if desired.

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