

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Minority Member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to take up a few moments of your time. My name is Dr. Kimberly Fuller and I am an assistant professor in the School of Social Work at Cleveland State University and also a mental health clinician. I stand before you today in support of HB 160.

Throughout my career, I have been given the honor of hearing the stories of so many wonderful and brave people who have overcome life's greatest obstacles: the passing of a loved one, work stress, relationships ending, abuse, and many other stressors that interfere with their happiness. When I talk to someone who is LGBTQ, many of their stressors do not stop there. Just the other day, I was told the story of a young woman who felt terrified to stand up to her co-workers who were slinging homophobic and transphobic slurs in the workplace, words that she described as "cutting into her soul." She has no legal workplace protections to be able to request that this language cease, and feels as though there is no employer support in a workplace where such rhetoric is normalized. Another woman who is in the process of her transition, who is not yet at a place where she would be able to "pass," is most worried about ending her marriage because she's not sure she would be able to successfully obtain affordable housing without inappropriate questions or comments by potential landlords or even be permitted to rent housing from them at all. I wish I could tell you that these stories are just an anomaly, but time and time again I hear the same narrative: I don't feel safe here.

I must also admit I wear a second hat as I speak. I identify as a lesbian and a person whose gender isn't so much captured by the terms "male" and "female". Throughout my own life, I have hesitated in telling employers and landlords who I really am. For many years, I would describe my then-partner as my "roommate" or my "friend," fearful that if someone found out I would lose my job or my housing. I remember about six months into my first real "adult" job telling a story about my "roommate" and my boss stopped the story and said "you know we all know she's not your roommate". I could feel my heart beating out of my chest, and I remembered thinking, "This is it. Everything will change. I'm going to lose my job or I'm going to have to quit because I won't be able to handle the tension" and she must have been able to tell I was panicking, because the next thing she said was, "It's okay. We've always known. And it doesn't make a difference to us." She will never know how life-altering it was to hear those words. With that brief reassurance, I felt free to talk about my partner, just like everyone else. Knowing how isolated I felt, how alone and scared I was for someone to find out that I was a lesbian, I vowed to never let myself feel that fear and shame again. But many people aren't as lucky as I am to have control over employment and housing options.

Just recently, my partner and I were traveling in the Pacific Northwest, and I left with a feeling I quite frankly never get here: they like me. There were signs on almost every establishment saying "we accept..." and then they list all the different types of people that could be in existence, which explicitly stated acceptance of all sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions. And because of those signs, I intentionally

patronized several stores that I would have generally walked on by. They made me feel like I was important to them. That MY business was important to them. Imagine a world where people feel that way about Ohio businesses. Where not only do people want to patronize these places more frequently because they're open and affirming, but they also want to work there because they are open, affirming, and value the LGBTQ people. Imagine communities where everyone is able to express and feel acceptance for who they are and who they love consistently in every city across all of Ohio. Where families of all types are able to live cohesively and equally. Imagine a place where the stories of LGBTQ people no longer start with, "I am afraid". With the passage of this bill, I believe we can change that narrative. Thank you to the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee. I am willing to answer any questions you may have at this time.