

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee,

My name is Lauren Doyle and I am writing in support of HB 160.

In the State of Ohio—the place where, as a young professional, I’ve chosen to make my home and build my business—I cannot be fired for being a woman. I can’t be fired for being Catholic. I can’t be fired for having short hair, being Black (or Asian, or Hispanic, or White). I can’t be fired for being deaf, having a learning disability or suffering from a medical ailment. I can’t be fired for being in my 30s... or 40s... or 50s...

In fact, there is only one reason for which I could be fired without justification or provocation, for a biological marker which I can’t control:

I can be fired for being gay or transgender.

As you’re well aware, the State of Ohio is one of several that offers only a patchwork of anti-discrimination protections that make it illegal to discriminate based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Some protections exist for public employees, and nondiscrimination policies exist at more than 80 of the state’s top employers—including small businesses like mine, Wordsworth Communications in Cincinnati—but these limited protections are inconsistent. We can do better.

*We must do better.*

Protecting Ohioans against discrimination based on color, religion, age, ancestry, national origin, handicap, or sexual orientation or gender identity isn’t just a human rights issue—though, of course, it is.

It also just makes good business sense.

As vice president of a boutique public relations firm, I’m responsible for recruiting the best, brightest and most talented employees to build our business. We’re poised for incredible growth—hoping to double in size within five years—and to do that, we need access to a strong talent pipeline. I know from firsthand experience that the dynamic, innovative, “best of the best” talent looks for vibrant, exciting, progressive places to live.

I firmly believe Cincinnati, and Ohio in general, should be at the top of their list. Yet there is a glaring black mark against my city and state: anti-discrimination legislation is inconsistent. This means if I hire a gay man at my business in Cincinnati, he can be refused housing just 20 minutes north, in West Chester, based solely on his sexual orientation.

In an industry in which an estimated 15% of practitioners are gay, that’s simply unacceptable. My mind reels at the incredible candidates I might be missing out on because there’s a lack of clear and consistent protections for the LGBTQ community. And I wouldn’t blame a well-qualified candidate one bit for choosing to look for employment elsewhere.

Ohio must be competitive. We must be innovative. We must be a state of choice for the best and brightest employees and engaged citizens. We must live up to the old slogan, “The heart of it all.” And

we must stand on the right side of history celebrating—and protecting—our diversity, individuality and uniqueness.

We can only do that if we treat all our citizens equally.

I hope you will consider passing this important legislation: for our employees and employers, our communities, our citizens and our state. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further.

Respectfully,

Lauren Doyle  
Vice President, Wordsworth Communications