



December 11, 2017

**Re: House Bill 160, "Expanded Civil Rights and Related Procedures"**

Dear House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee,

I am writing to you today in support of HB160. I am Lauren Green-Hull, the Associate Director of Fair Housing Contact Service (FHCS). FHCS is a non-profit, private fair housing advocacy organization that serves Summit, Stark, Portage, and Medina Counties. Our agency is the oldest fair housing organization in the state, as we have been operating continuously for 53 years. It is our mission to strive to eliminate housing discrimination and promote equal housing opportunities.

When you think of your home, what are some of the most important things you think about? The size of your home, having enough space for your family? The school district it is located in so you can feel confident your child is going to receive an outstanding education and be safe during the school day? Or do you think about your access to things that make your life easier, like a grocery store, your medical care facilities, or a park? I believe all persons should be able to identify housing they can afford that meets all of these needs, but sadly, persons can and are being denied the housing of their choice because of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression in most municipalities in Ohio.

It is my belief that this bill will take great strides to support our agency's mission. FHCS has worked with a number of local municipalities in our service area to implement full non-discrimination ordinances that include protections on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. The implementation of these local ordinances has opened up housing opportunities in these communities; however, there are so many more communities that are not covered. Furthermore, the addition of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression to our state laws would allow the Ohio Civil Rights Commission (OCRC) to investigate and make determinations regarding concerns of discrimination on these bases. The resource of OCRC to our state is invaluable as it pertains to housing discrimination concerns. OCRC staff are local to and familiar with communities which makes investigations much more effective. Additionally, the staff of OCRC have a vast array of investigative experience to address nuanced cases like those that involve discrimination on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

Our agency has conducted research into the discrimination faced by persons based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. Our study in 2012 showed that 35% of individuals were treated differently in a housing transaction due to their sexual orientation, and that



percentage increases to 47% on the basis of gender identity. FHCS has seen an increase in concerns brought to our attention on both of these bases, but especially based on gender identity. In spite of this increase, when someone comes to our agency with concerns of housing discrimination on either of these bases, there is often very little our agency can do to assist them because of the lack of protections for our community members on these bases.

Ohio has been a leader in addressing concerns of housing discrimination. We are able to boast about having some of the first fair housing laws in the country, a large number of active private fair housing organizations, and many of the most influential housing discrimination court decisions have come from cases that originated in Ohio.

If you have any further questions for me, I can be reached at the information below. I ask for your support in continuing to keep Ohio on this path of leadership by adding to our state law protections on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lauren G. Green-Hull".

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