

HB160 Testimony: Liz Hornikel

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Liz Hornikel.

I support the legislation, HB 160, being considered. There is no better reason for me to support this legislation than the simple truth that all people deserve to be themselves every day – when we are at home eating dinner with our families, when we are getting our morning coffee at the local coffee shop and when we are at work, sitting among other people who never have to fear they will lose their job by simply talking about their husband, wife, partner or children. I have lived the last decade in fear to talk about something as simple as what I did over the weekend. Afraid that a simple statement about my girlfriend of 11 years and I hiking or going on a trip together could result in my termination. Something as simple as putting up a picture in my office because I don't know what domino effect it might bring forward. Then I think about how afraid I am – someone who has the ability to hide this part of who I am because it might not be obvious to all, someone who hasn't been physically attacked or fired yet because I am a lesbian – and I think of how easy I have it compared to so many of my friends, family and co-workers. My passion is around advocacy and the inherent belief that we all deserve to know how it feels to be ourselves. I hear stories on a regular basis of colleagues, friends and family members who are discriminated against because they are a woman wearing a tie or they are transgender and are afraid for their lives if they are uncovered in public or at work to the wrong person at the wrong time. Sometimes, even I need to walk in the shoes of those around me to understand the true impact of this fear.

That's why this legislation is so important. For the people that cannot effectively bring their entire selves to work and have to subconsciously and consciously fear sharing details about something as simple as their family. Those LGBTQ families that don't feel comfortable going to a local pizza shop to have dinner because they might not be allowed. The women who want or need to shop in the men's section of a store but fear they will be kicked out. I have lived in Ohio my entire life, I went to Ohio State University, and I work for a local corporation. I understand that traveling just outside of Columbus with my girlfriend can be dangerous because discrimination is still legal.

There is change happening in corporations and businesses across the globe. There is now recognition of the importance for colleagues to bring their entire selves to work – for the sake of efficiency, productivity, loyalty and retention. Imagine the change we can see if this legislation is passed. Imagine the workforce we would create, the lives we would save and the honor we would restore into so many people and families in the state of Ohio. I won't be afraid to put that picture up in my office and I won't hear stories of discrimination from those closest to me because they will no longer have to be afraid.

I would like to thank the committee and am willing to answer questions.