

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee: My name is Lynn Carter, and my comments are my own, I am not representing an organization. I support HB 160 for several reasons.

In 1992, Cincinnati City Council made it illegal to discriminate against persons based on their sexual orientation. When the law was repealed, several organizations, local and national, boycotted the city-and refused to schedule conventions and other events in Cincinnati. According to some estimates, the city lost \$40 million dollars in contracts. Across the country, state and local legislators have found that when they passed laws that specifically excluded members of the LGBTQ community from protection against discrimination, there has been a negative economic result. When North Carolina and Indiana passed these types of laws, several organizations announced that they would cancel plans to do business in those state, and some organizations canceled programs that required their customers or employees to travel to those states. Each state lost, or had the potential to lose, millions of dollars in revenue. In short, it makes business sense to pass this legislation.

Ohio Business Competes is a coalition of organizations committed “to promoting an attractive, prosperous, and economically vibrant Ohio.” Members include, The Ohio State University, Cardinal Health, Dow, Huntington Bancshares, Proctor and Gamble, Timken Steel, Taft, Stettinius and Hollister, and Vorys, Sater, Seymour and Peas. In order to remain attractive to businesses--large and small, law firms, and institutions of higher education, Ohio must protect members of the LGBTQ community from discrimination. Whether it is a CEO of a corporation, or an individual who is making a relocation decision for business, professional or educational reasons, they will consider several factors. The presence of a nondiscrimination law that provides equal protection to its LGBTQ citizens could be the deciding factor in their decision. In an era of tax abatements and other economic incentives offered by state and local governments to encourage businesses to relocate, Ohio, in order to remain competitive, must update its laws to include provisions that prohibit discrimination against its LGBTQ citizens.

On a personal level, I do not necessarily meet the definition of an ‘activist,’ but in my personal and professional life, I have attempted to ensure that laws and processes are fair. I was a member of DignityUSA, a Roman Catholic LGBT group. When Matthew Shepard was murdered, I worked with other members of the Columbus chapter to sponsor “The Shepard Initiative,” an interfaith conference. The conference included several ministers, and it had an educational focus. The message was that a church pastor who had become infamous for protesting at funerals of persons from the LGBTQ community did not speak for most religious views or doctrine.

I was also a part of team that drafted a municipality’s first domestic partner benefit ordinance. As the process progressed, I was told that some African American employees were bemoaning the fact that ‘*they* aren’t like us, and *they* should stop talking about civil rights.’ After I spoke at City Council as an advocate for the legislation, I was told that these staff members said, “after Lynn spoke, I got it—it’s not about special rights, it’s about equal rights, and no matter what I may personally believe, all city employees should get the same benefits.”

The *Obergefell* decision was a milestone, and yet, events throughout the country remind us that we are not yet at a place where, “Equality, diversity and inclusiveness are universally valued.” Discrimination exists and it is often perpetuated by unfair laws. I believe that persons like yourselves, who are in a position to make our state’s anti-discrimination laws totally inclusive may not completely appreciate the impact of one feeling the need to hide, or to live an inauthentic life because they believe that if they ‘come out,’ they can/will lose their livelihood. To paraphrase a statement by the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., ‘injustice to anyone is a threat to justice for everyone.’ Please end the inequity in Ohio’s discrimination law, and ensure that Ohio’s economy can continue to grow and thrive.

Sincerely,

Lynn Carter