

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Dr. Maurice Stinnett and I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 160.

I am the Vice President of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement at Cleveland State University (CSU). As an institution of higher education, CSU believes it is crucial that all of its students are afforded the opportunity to develop and grow personally, socially, and intellectually. In order to achieve this, students must feel safe, secure, and empowered to contribute in the classroom, get involved in extracurricular activities, and bring their complete, authentic selves to campus every single day. For this reason, Cleveland State has a comprehensive non-discrimination policy that protects against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

However, our students don't just attend classes and study. They also have jobs, rent property, and spend their money daily in the many private businesses around our campus community and beyond. When they're outside the limits of campus and Cleveland's citywide non-discrimination protections, our students who may be perceived as LGBTQ are, under current Ohio law, vulnerable to discrimination that has not yet been made illegal. As a university that is concerned with the safety and wellbeing of our students, we find this unacceptable. Regardless of where they travel or conduct business in Ohio, our students should not have to fear legal discrimination.

The Cleveland State community experienced an anti-LGBTQ incident as recently as October of 2017, when a group called "Fascist Solutions" posted racist flyers around campus emphasizing white supremacy and encouraging LGBTQ individuals to commit suicide. This event profoundly upset many of our students, faculty, and staff—as it should.

Since then, we have doubled down on our efforts to promote the values of inclusion, compassion, empathy, and respect within our campus community. We have started a series of Town Hall events in order to provide a space for campus community members to be heard. Together, faculty, staff and students are able to collaborate with one another in order to identify and address safety issues, thereby facilitating the creation of a safe campus and a unified community. Sadly, the incident clearly illustrates the sentiment that we have long known exists towards the LGBTQ community.

We're doing our part, but we can't do it alone. In order to truly demonstrate to our LGBTQ-identified student and staff population that they are welcomed, valued, and celebrated, we need laws in the State of Ohio that reflect these principles. The Ohio Fairness Act is what Ohio needs to enable its LGBTQ citizens – including my students – to thrive personally and professionally. I urge you to pass this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.