

My name is Melissa Marie Alexander and I am the current Co- Chair of TransOhio, an organization which provides education, advocacy and support on a statewide basis for those who fall under the transgender umbrella. I am here to offer remarks concerning the need for legislation to protect my community from such discrimination in the state of Ohio.

As a transgender woman, I transitioned over a decade ago when I no longer could continue living a lie about who I am and always have been since I was a child. I wanted to live my life- work and interact with the community I lived as my true self. In my transition, I lost none of my training, education, experience or work ethic but employers and clients seem to act as if I had - for I faced discrimination and lost employment. I struggled through this process but in time I was able to build a new career teaching college level courses and the schools and students came to know me as a dedicated instructor who gave countless hours to ensure her students success as they readied themselves for entering competitive workforce to fill positions in our growing economy in Ohio. Some of the students were members of the LGBT community. They seek these

same opportunities to live and work here in our great state.

Ohio is a state of exploration and tourism as well and people travel from all over the country to visit Ohio and bring money into our economy. Sadly, as a leader of TransOhio I have received reports from some who, because of being in the community, were asked to leave restaurants and public venues. I ask you is that the message of welcome we want to have for visitors who come to our state?

Each week I receive messages from members of the community who have been denied jobs, fired like the young man near Athens who was terminated when his employer found out he was transgender or the young women in a Delaware who was denied work despite her talents and was told that she was not employable due to her being transgender. Another member of our community just recently told me that they cannot even think about coming out and living authentically because they fear being kicked out of their apartment by their landlord who has made it clear people like them are not welcome to live there.

A very recent survey of Ohio transgender residents revealed that 26 % of community is in poverty. This same survey also revealed 30% of those who held or applied for a job during that year reported being fired, being denied a promotion, or not being hired for a job they applied for because of their gender identity or expression. Of respondents who visited a place of public accommodation where staff or employees thought or knew they were transgender, 32% experienced at least one type of mistreatment in the past year. This included 16% who were denied equal treatment or service, 26% who were verbally harassed, and 1% who were physically attacked because of being transgender. This same survey also revealed that 25% of respondents experienced some form of housing discrimination in the past year, such as being evicted from their home or denied a home or apartment because of being transgender, 33% have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives and 15% experienced homelessness in the past year because of being transgender.

Employers who come to Ohio seek a diverse workforce. Members of the transgender community are talented people who offer a rich life experience and

determination that would make a great asset for these employers and add to the talented diversity they seek in their companies and organizations. The state of Ohio should send a clear message that our state is open to all who come here to employ, to work, to live and to visit and that when they do so, they will find a welcoming state.

That welcome should extend to the LGBT community as well. There is no better message that Ohio can send to employers, organizations, citizens and visitors alike than with the passage of HB160- which will announce loud and clear that Ohio welcomes all to establish business, work and live as well as travel freely about our great state without fear of discrimination.

Thank you,