



WRITTEN STATEMENT

**BEFORE THE OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES GOVERNMENT
ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

HEARING ON

“THE OHIO FAIRNESS ACT (H.B. 160)”

January 31, 2018

Michaela Hahn Burriss

Small Business Majority

Dear Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee:

As a representative of the 28 million small business owners across the nation and the more than 900,000 small businesses in Ohio, Small Business Majority writes today urging you to support the Ohio Fairness Act, which would revise Ohio’s nondiscrimination code to include protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.

Small Business Majority is a nonpartisan, nonprofit small business advocacy organization, founded and run by small business owners to ensure America’s entrepreneurs are a key part of a thriving economy. We conduct scientific opinion polling across the country, including state-specific polling in Ohio, to help us educate and inform policymakers about key issues impacting small businesses and freelancers. As the Ohio Outreach Manager for Small Business Majority, I meet with small business owners across the state to better understand how small businesses are impacted by key issues.

Through our research and our advocacy work for the small business community in Ohio, we know small business owners support policies that create a safe and inclusive business environment because they boost business owners’ bottom lines by helping companies attract and retain talent, and because they believe it’s the right thing to do.

While 20 cities in Ohio have some form of nondiscrimination protections, this patchwork approach means not all of Ohio’s citizens receive equal protections in employment and public accommodations. That’s why it’s crucial for the legislature to implement a uniform, statewide nondiscrimination policy that will extend such protections to all Ohioans, and many of our state’s small business owners agree. Small business owners understand the importance of attracting and keeping a strong talent pool, something Ohio has struggled to do. Despite its world-class system of universities, more college graduates are leaving Ohio than moving in. A statewide nondiscrimination policy, however, would show that Ohio has an inclusive business environment, which is necessary to encouraging talented entrepreneurs and workers to stay in the state or move here to start new businesses.

In fact, Small Business Majority recently polled a random sample of small business owners across the country, as well as a survey of Ohio small business owners, and found the vast majority of Ohio’s entrepreneurs support enacting additional protections that would ensure everyone receives equal access to public accommodations and employment, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Almost two-thirds of Ohio entrepreneurs support protecting LGBT individuals against

discrimination in places of public accommodations, such as restaurants, hotels and other businesses that are open to the public.

What's more, the majority of small employers support state laws that would protect against employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Indeed, more than six in 10 Ohio small business owners support state legislation that would prevent employment discrimination against LGBT employees. Additionally, seven in 10 Ohio small business owners oppose denying someone goods or services based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, based on a business owner's religious beliefs. It's important to note that the respondents were politically diverse, as survey respondents were roughly equally split across political ideologies with 38% identifying as Republican, 41% identifying as Democrats and 20% as independent.

Small business owners often think of their employees as family, so it's not surprising they support policies that help foster a happier workforce while protecting their workers and their bottom line. But most small businesses are very small, and often don't have HR departments or employee handbooks, and they don't have the time or resources to research nondiscrimination issues and put a formal policy in place themselves. A state law can make it easier for employers to have a uniform policy, which in turn helps Ohio's economy by creating a streamlined system. Employers know that nondiscrimination policies improve their ability to attract and retain the best and brightest employees and help draw in more customers, which is good for business. In fact, our survey found a majority of Ohio small business owners believe that laws protecting against discrimination improve the business bottom line.

As these numbers show, small employers believe employees and customers alike deserve to be treated fairly and equally, and that it's time to enact policies protecting everyone from discrimination in the workplace and in public accommodations. We hope you consider small business support for this legislation and promote a more inclusive business environment in Ohio. This will help small businesses retain quality employees and create a happier, healthier workforce and community for everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

Sincerely,
Michaela Hahn Burriss
Ohio Outreach Manager