

HB 160 Testimony January 31, 2018

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Michelle Tomallo. I am a native Ohioan: born in Dayton, raised in Centerville, attended Miami University, lived in Cincinnati for several years and in Columbus for a short period and have proudly called Cleveland my home for the last 24 years.

Like the majority of Ohioans, I support House Bill 160.

I support HB 160 as a citizen, a business owner, a chamber of commerce leader, a workforce champion, and as a member of the LGBTQ community.

I am the President and Cofounder of FIT Technologies, a managed IT services firm of 65 staff with a payroll of \$3.75 million each year. We employ roles like help desk and field support staff, network, server and phone engineers, project managers, procurement professionals and other staff in HR and finance. The average salary for our employees is a little over \$65,000.

For roles that we need, our mid-size firm competes for talent with all sorts of organizations— Fortune 500 companies, organizations like those represented here today, or those other 300+ members of Ohio Business Competes. For FIT or ANY of these other organizations, our companies benefit in such a competitive market when we increase the applicant pool. But in Ohio, we LIMIT the applicant pool by having laws that discriminate. As a service business, our growth is almost solely dependent on recruiting capable talent.

What's more, recent national research has shown that the most sought-after talent values diversity and equality. This talent expects to work in organizations and in states that have protections for its citizens and don't legislate discrimination.

Like many states in the US, we have workforce issues. In Northeast Ohio alone, we have about 20,000 open jobs—and most likely other areas have similar woes. My guess is that the General Assembly is aware of these needs given that the state has made massive investments in strategic workforce initiatives covering nearly every county.

Those of us in civic and business leadership—in our own markets, in our own industries, in our chambers of commerce, and education institutions and economic development hubs and partner agencies—we likewise expend significant resources attempting to bridge these gaps: systems changes, career days, job shadowing, internships, OTJs, recruitment events, retraining efforts.

It is disheartening at best and counter-productive at worst to know we're doing all this in a state with laws that are in direct opposition to the goals of expanding our workforce, and contradict the idea of Ohio as a "destination of choice". We lose our competitiveness against other states in the attraction and retention of employees and employers.

Before concluding, I wanted to touch on my work with the LGBT Chamber of Commerce for the last decade. Our chamber is based in NEO but we have an affiliate of the National LGBT Chamber based in DC. I work with many stakeholders in this effort: LGBT and allied business owners, LGBT professionals, corporate partners, employee resource groups, Diversity and inclusion professionals and other leaders focused on creating inclusive and diverse communities.

Nearly every week –for a decade– the need for workplace protections is underscored. Last week, it was by a software developer who recounted being told if she wants to keep her job, she shouldn't tell her manager she is a lesbian. A month ago, it was an African American who thought there were enough reasons the SBA might reject his application, he's not going to check the box indicating he's LGBT. Last year, it was the gay couple from Boston being recruited to Cleveland describing how it felt to be stripped of their equal rights by moving to Ohio.

Unfortunately, most of us here today could share hours of testimony like that.

BUT FORTUNATELY, we are here, giving testimony.

And through this, I hope we know more. We know more facts, we know more stories, more polls, more research. We know better.

And now it's time to do better.

Let's protect all our citizens.

Let's stop getting in the way of ourselves.

Let's stop being embarrassed by our laws.

Let's stop legislating discrimination.

Let's REALLY be open for business.

Let's compete.

Let's BE the GREAT state of Ohio.

Let's move House Bill 160.

Thank you for your time in hearing my testimony today. If you have any questions, I am happy to answer them.