

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

My name is Noel Cummings and I am writing in support of House Bill 160.

I am a woman who happens to be transgender. I hold an MBA from Cleveland State University and I am a member of Beta Gamma Sigma, an international business honor society. After 25 years of progressive and successful employment with the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, evidenced by consistent above average performance appraisals, I was passed over for promotional opportunities at the senior management and Director levels for male counterparts who were not only less qualified with respect to education and experience (high school diplomas and Associates degrees), but did not meet the minimum qualifications for the jobs established and required for appointment by the company. When I brought this matter to the attention of the CEO and suggested that I was being discriminated against based on my gender or gender identity, he did not respond to me nor did he commit to having the matter investigated. I was subsequently fired by my director, a known convicted felon, who had been rehired by the Deputy General Manager of the Operations Division. In the end, not only did I experience discrimination, but when I spoke up, there was retaliation. I was punished and my economic lifeline was taken away. It has been almost three years and my career remains in tatters. I have not been able to find other employment or otherwise recover. What has happened to me is simply indefensible. No one should be diminished and/or destroyed in this fashion simply because they are different.

As excruciating and demoralizing as this experience has been, what has made it worse and near unbearable, is the reality that there is currently no legal recourse available to me through the State of Ohio. The state that I have called home for over thirty years; where I completed my graduate education and have enjoyed the fellowship of church family and friends for decades. I cannot fully express how it feels to know that I have been relegated to second or third class citizenship and that the arc of my professional possibilities and aspirations have been somehow limited because of who I am. All I can say is that there is a profound sense of alienation and disenfranchisement that permeates my being. But move forward, I must; and move forward, I shall. The promise I have made to myself is to overcome this blockade, not with malice for my malefactors, which could certainly be justified, but with the commitment to deconstruct this barrier and build a bridge of understanding to a better way of being.

It is my understanding that several municipalities within the State of Ohio have already recognized the importance of protecting, i.e., valuing, their residents and other constituencies equally and have accordingly passed legislation to that end. However, if such actions were taken not out of a moral imperative, because it is simply the right thing to do, perhaps it is because they realized that it makes them stronger as a community and better prepared to compete for the human resources and other capital

investiture that can ultimately be the keys to their economic viability today, which is their regional survival tomorrow. Ohio can only be made better by embracing full equality for all its citizens and opening its doors to all who are willing to bring their talents, skills and abilities to make life better for one and all.

I urge you to consider passing HB160.