

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Rebecca Olarte and I am writing in support of HB 160.

I currently live in Oakland, California but I am a native of Ohio and was a resident of Northeast Ohio for thirty years. I have great respect for the state and the communities I have been a part of and I believe that the passage of HB 160 will allow Ohio to demonstrate its forward-looking and inclusive nature.

As a lesbian living in California, I have been able to explore my career without the fear that my job or my housing security is at the whim of an employer or landlord that does not agree with my lifestyle, in spite of my performance. This basic freedom that is guaranteed to so many citizens - to be able to honestly answer your manager about who you are going home to or who you are legally married to without risking your ability to earn a paycheck or a roof over your head is almost impossible to describe. I would urge the committee to consider any time they've been asked by a colleague or manager what they did over the weekend and try to answer honestly without using gender-specific pronouns. If you could be terminated for answering that question in a way that your employer disagrees with but is legal, it is impossible to participate fully in work culture, bring your unique perspective to your job, and have the same headspace as your coworkers.

I grew up in Ohio, attending Trinity High School in Garfield Hts., Bowling Green State University, and Cleveland State University. My family and many friends are in Ohio and it would be comforting to know that I could return someday. In addition, it has been a dream of mine to return to Cleveland with the skills and education I have gained in the SF Bay area and help build technology solutions at home. However, without the guarantee that my civil rights will be protected, I cannot consider moving back at this time. The thought that I could be denied housing, employment, or access to educational resources because of my sexuality or gender expression is a large enough hurdle to prevent the possibility of returning. I cannot risk being denied fundamental rights and I will not live dishonestly.

In addition to the rights outlined above, it is in my experience that when a community, a state, and government protects its citizens at a legal level, there is less harassment and an overall feeling of security that is hard to quantify.

Thank you for allowing my testimony and I am happy to answer questions on this issue.

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