

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Minority Member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Sandra J. Anderson and I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 160.

I am a lifelong Ohioan. I grew up on a farm in Ross County, obtained my Bachelor's degree at Ohio University, and earned my law degree at Northwestern University in Chicago. Upon graduation from law school, I returned to Ohio to clerk for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit in Cincinnati, and then went on to practice law for 33 years with Vorys, Sater, Seymour and Pease LLP, in Columbus, Ohio. My focus as a trial lawyer and partner in the firm included civil litigation and employment law. After retiring from the Vorys firm, I served as Associate Vice President and Deputy General Counsel in The Office of Legal Affairs for The Ohio State University. I am now retired and focusing on non-profit service, including for Equality Ohio.

While practicing law, I was acutely and painfully aware of the lack of basic civil rights protections for LGBTQ folks here in Ohio. In advising and defending employers involved in cases or complaints alleging discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, I knew and had to advise my clients that the law did not provide non-discrimination protections for such employees. Under the law, my business clients were safe to discriminate against LGBTQ employees and applicants. The state of Ohio law was and is a personal affront to me and only reinforced my own fears of repercussion and rejection if I were to share my sexual orientation with others in my workplace, or even to my family and friends.

While Ohio law hasn't changed for the better – not just yet – some things have changed in Ohio and the nation over the course of my personal and professional life. Now it's time for the law to catch up. That is why I – once a closeted and fearful young lawyer who happens to be gay -- am proud to chair the board of the Equality Ohio Education Fund Board. And I am proud to add my voice urging you to pass the Ohio Fairness Act.

You see, I was a partner not just with a law firm, but with a woman, too. After 21 years together, Lynn and I were married in Seattle, Washington, on August 9, 2014, just a year before marriage equality would become the law in all states. It was the happiest weekend of my life – so far. When we returned to Ohio, our marriage was not yet recognized in this state, and because we happen to be gay, we could be fired, denied housing, or refused public accommodations for sharing our marriage with others. In a fair and free society, this is unacceptable. No Ohioan should have to hide who they are – or who they are married to – out of fear of legalized discrimination that might result.

Today, many of the same businesses who previously used Ohio's lack of comprehensive non-discrimination protections to justify treating LGBTQ employees or applicants differently have seen the light. They put into place their own internal non-discrimination policies. Why? Because it is good for business. It helps them compete

for talent. It creates a positive and welcoming workplace environment for recruiting, retention and productivity. In fact, businesses and organizations all across our state are actively advocating for the passage of statewide non-discrimination protections, which are long overdue. Right now, over 300 businesses are members of Ohio Business Competes, a nonpartisan coalition of companies that support LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination policy in housing, employment, and public accommodations for the entire State of Ohio. My former employers – the Vorys law firm and The Ohio State University – are members of OBC, as is my alma mater, Ohio University, which I proudly served as a nine-year member of the Board of Trustees.

It is high time for Ohio law to catch up with what Ohio's businesses, universities, organizations and municipalities already know and are practicing one at a time: That non-discrimination protections are good for recruiting and retaining talent in this state. I daresay that Amazon and other employers looking at Ohio for a potential location will be quite interested in what happens to this proposed legislation. Please send a strong message to current and potential employers that Ohio is not closed and unfair but is, instead, open and welcoming.

Please, I urge you to pass the Ohio Fairness Act.

Thank you for your time and consideration.