

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Sarae Pacetta and I'm a teacher and a parent who supports the legislation, HB 160, being considered today.

I support HB 160 because people deserve to not have their liberty restricted by who they are or who they love. While HB 160 will protect against discrimination related to sexual orientation, I'm going to speak today about its protections related to gender identity, because that aspect hits closest to home for me. When my now 10-year-old, Cosimo, was 4, they asked me if they were a boy or a girl. Over the past 6 years, our family has learned a lot about gender diversity, and I now understand that not all people are boys or men, or women or girls. My child has said for 6 years that they feel like both a boy and a girl, and calls their gender identity "gender creative." Gender experts call it non-binary gender, and an increasing number of people find that this identity fits them, too. In my testimony today, I'll use the pronouns "they" and "them" to refer to my child, as they have said that neither "he" nor "she" feels right to them as someone in the middle of the gender spectrum.

Transgender and gender non-binary people are not a threat to anyone. They have been living, learning and working alongside --and going to the bathroom alongside-- the rest of our community forever. With the passage of HB 160, a person who sexually assaults someone in a bathroom or locker room, whether this person is trans or cis-gender, is still subject to criminal penalty, as they should be. This law does not change that. Cities with legal LGBTQ protections have not seen an uptick in sexual assault cases. The reason people sexually assault others is because they are sexual predators; it is not because they are transgender.

As I was working on this testimony, Cosimo asked what I was doing. They're only 10, and we haven't talked yet about all of the ways in which LGBTQ people are subjected to discrimination and even violence. When I described the protections this law would provide, they were livid realizing that it is currently legal to be fired or evicted just for being who you are. And they were hurt. They asked, "Why is that OK? What's the reason I could be evicted because I'm gender creative?" I wasn't sure what to say. "People are scared of you?" or "People don't believe you are worth as much as a cis-gender person?" I settled on saying, "People don't understand this issue. The more they understand that there isn't anything wrong with LGBTQ people, that LGBTQ people aren't a threat to anyone, they'll realize this is just about treating others as they want to be treated." Cosimo said that they learned about this in school, and that it's called The Golden Rule.

My child deserves to be protected from discrimination, just as every other LGBTQ person in the world does, and we can take another step toward that by extending legal protection here, in Ohio. This law would tell my child there is nothing so weird, wrong, or scary about them, and that they deserve to be treated like everyone else. I think every parent in this room knows that their child deserves to hear that message.

When Thomas Jefferson wrote "all men are created equal," he intended that to mean all white men who own property. But since then, our values have changed and we have a higher ideal. We don't want to be the people holding the line on a bigoted system. We want to be the ones that moved forward equality for all.

I so appreciate your time today, and for considering a law that means so much to my child, and to many who I love dearly. I am willing to answer questions.