



Written Testimony of Sarah Warbelow, Legal Director of the Human Rights Campaign,  
in Support of House Bill 160: the Ohio Fairness Act to  
The House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee

January 30, 2018

Chair Blessing and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sarah Warbelow, and I am the Legal Director of the Human Rights Campaign, America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. On behalf of our over three million members and supporters nationwide, I am honored to submit this statement in support of House Bill 160, the Ohio Fairness Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

On January 21, 2011, Governor John Kasich signed a civil rights executive order creating non-discrimination protections for lesbian, gay, and bisexual state employees. The Fairness Act is an opportunity to follow Governor Kasich's lead and extend these protections to state workers on the basis of their gender identity and expression as well as to the LGBT citizens of Ohio at large.

Anti-discrimination laws send a strong message that all of Ohio's residents matter. In a report HRC conducted in 2012, we found that 92 percent of LGBT youth say they hear negative messages about being LGBT, and six of ten LGBT youth report hearing negative messages about being LGBT from their elected leaders. More than four in ten LGBT youth state that their state government is not accepting of LGBT people, and 63 percent of LGBT youth say they will need to move from where they currently live in order to feel accepted. Ohio can't afford to lose young talent because young people feel unwelcome or are unprotected by state law. Today it is time to protect the most vulnerable among us by extending civil rights protections to cover gender identity.

The Ohio Chamber of Commerce and about 300 companies support passage of HB 160. Major Ohio businesses, such as AT&T, Eaton, General Electric, Hyland, Huntington, KeyBank, Lubrizol, Sherwin-Williams and University Hospitals, have joined a coalition of businesses in the state calling for the passage of the Ohio Fairness Act. A key component of supporting business and ensuring the availability of qualified workers is ensuring civil rights in the workplace and public accommodations.

Protecting Ohioans from discrimination in the provision of health insurance, housing, hiring, alcohol, drug, and mental health treatment, and other areas of public life will allow individuals to focus on staying healthy and building productive and fulfilling lives. Ohioans overwhelmingly support legislation such as HB 160 as 79 percent of Ohio registered voters believe that laws should be passed banning discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations based on both sexual orientation and gender identity



Passage of HB 160 would rectify what is a significant lack of civil rights protections for Ohioans, and would put Ohio in good company. Beginning with an ordinance passed in Minneapolis in 1975, 19 states, the District of Columbia, and more than 100 cities and counties – including Coshocton, Lima, Wickliffe and Newark – have enacted laws prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The majority of Fortune 500 companies have voluntarily adopted policies that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The time has come for Ohio to finally act and ensure that discrimination has no place in this great state. Please vote in favor of House Bill 160.

Sincerely,

Sarah Warbelow  
Legal Director  
Human Rights Campaign