

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee,

My name is Shauna Tepper and I am writing this testimony to represent Kaleidoscope Youth Center. I am a master's candidate in the College of Social Work at The Ohio State University, equipped with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from The Ohio State University. I support the legislation, HB 160 that is currently under consideration.

I am a lesbian, and Ohioan. I absolutely *love* Ohio. I am the third generation on both sides of my family to be born and raised in Ohio. I love the spirit, pride, and warmth so unique to Ohio. I love the cornfields, rolling hills, and lush foliage; each beautiful lake, stream, and river. Ohio has so much to offer, so many things to be proud of, and so many opportunities. Passing HB 160 is currently one of the greatest opportunities for Ohio and its citizens. Revising the Ohio Fairness Act to extend basic civil rights to the LGBTQ+ community in Ohio would impact the lives of so many Ohioans in an incredibly positive way. Ultimately, I believe this bill will have the most impact on LGBTQ+ Ohio youth; directly impacting how they envision their futures, realize their potential, and feelings of safety. We want to keep youth, young adults, and families in Ohio. To do that, they need to know they will be equally protected in housing, employment, and public services; just like everyone else.

The impact of passing this bill will have tangible, long-lasting, and far reaching effects on our children here in Ohio. Growing up knowing you will be protected, valued, and afforded the same rights as your peers is crucial to the development of healthy young adults. It is fundamental for all Ohioans to be treated equally, and to set that example for our youth, regardless of sexual orientation and or gender identity/expression. Passing HB 160 could change the lives of LGBTQ+ youth in Ohio almost immediately; LGBTQ+ Youth represent up to seven percent of youth living in America, and disproportionately represent up to forty percent of homeless youth living in America. All youth need to have equal access to housing, employment, and public services if they are able to survive, thrive, and contribute in Ohio. Simply because they are human beings.

Kaleidoscope Youth Center is an after school drop-in center solely dedicated to LGBTQ+ youth and allies in Ohio. KYC youth are some of the most intelligent, vibrant, and resilient people I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. These outstanding human beings deserve to be treated with the upmost fairness, respect, and equality. KYC youth, and myself, believe working, living, and benefitting from public services cannot be contingent upon sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. We must send this message across Ohio. We must reflect this in our legislation. We must represent the voices of nearly three quarters of Ohioans who echo these sentiments.

I have no intent to live anywhere else in America, which is why I am here today, fighting for myself, the majority of Ohioans, and most importantly, for the future of our youth in this state. I am a *proud* lesbian Ohioan. I grew up, came out, and fell in love in this beautiful state. While I would not trade these experiences for the world, it definitely was not easy, simply because I am a lesbian. My only hope is to make life better for those who come after me. Testifying on behalf of HB 160 allows me the incredible opportunity to do so. In solidarity, I expect this committee to seize this striking opportunity to impact the lives of our youth for the better; affording all Ohioans, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, equal rights.

I thank the committee for their time and consideration of my thoughts on this vital legislation.

In Solidarity,
Shauna Tepper