

Testimony of Steve Brown in support of Ohio Fairness Act, HB160

I speak today in support of HB 160, the Ohio Fairness Act. I speak professionally as the Co-Owner and Broker of Irongate Realtors, the largest local independent real estate company in the Miami Valley; as a former President of our local association, Dayton Realtors; as a former President of our state association, Ohio Realtors; and as a former President of the National Association of Realtors, the largest professional trade association in the nation, with over 1.3 million members. I also speak personally as one who has experienced discrimination in housing, because someone thought my family might be Jewish.

Ironically, nearly 50 years after that unforgettable experience, the very same laws which would now protect my family from such discrimination, would still allow me to be denied housing because I am gay.

There is only one reason – the ability to afford the housing a person desires – that should constrain someone's right to purchase, lease, or rent so basic a need as shelter. For housing is more basic than a right – it is a need; it is a requisite to a right, for without housing, the life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness on which our political life together is grounded is impossible.

Our forefathers and mothers, as they strove to form a more perfect union, recognized this truth – and over the last 50 years have removed barrier after barrier to housing: initially race, color, national origin and religion were protected. Later gender, familial status and disability were added to the list of protected classes. To this list, sexual orientation and gender identity is the necessary expansion of today's generation.

I have had more than 40 years experience as a Realtor on the local, state and national levels. I can tell you personally and professionally that housing discrimination, for whatever reason, however it is packaged,

and wherever it has been practiced, is bad business. Free and open housing markets promote economic growth, community improvement and political stability.

As a profession, Realtors, to our shame, have been on all sides of discriminatory practices. We initially opposed fair housing laws based on race for fear of property value loss, and we were neutral regarding disabilities because of the potential costs of accommodations.

Today, however, every Realtor will tell you that there are no advantages to any form of discrimination. That is why today the National Association of Realtors is leading efforts to overcome housing discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Our Realtor Code of Ethics is over 100 year's old; but we amended it two years ago. Today it is a violation of the Realtor's Code of Ethics to discriminate in anyway based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The bottom line is that no one should be denied the housing they can afford, the neighborhood they wish to live in, the opportunities a city or state offers, because they are LGBTQ - or because someone thinks they might be. Certainly Ohio should not be such a place. I strongly encourage you to adopt the Ohio Fairness Act.

Thank you. I would be happy to entertain any questions you might have.

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