

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is the Reverend Ian Lynch, and I serve Old South United Church of Christ in Kirtland, Ohio as their pastor. Our congregation and our denomination have a long commitment to extending the extravagant welcome of God to all regardless of who they are or where they are on life's journey. For thirty years now, the national setting of our church has been explicit that this welcome extends to members of the LGBTQ+ community. There is little doubt that the current vitality in our congregation is due in no small part to a decision made a decade ago to state our explicit acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community publicly.

I speak today in support of HB 160. Businesses that are open to the public should be open to everyone on the same terms, including to customers who are gay or transgender. Nobody should be turned away from a business, denied service in a restaurant, or evicted from their apartment simply because of who they are or who they love. Protecting these rights for those who have had a history of being excluded and discriminated against is surely in keeping with the high moral ideals we uphold in our society. I think you will agree that our society is greater when all have unhindered access to opportunity. Is that not at the heart of what America stands for?

In the vast majority of incidences, granting rights to one group takes nothing away from any other group. One might argue that some strongly held religious beliefs will be restricted if this bill is passed. That is no little concern. Clearly, as an ordained minister I am concerned about the protection of the right to free exercise of religion. But there is a difference between a right to free exercise and the imposition of a particular expression of a particular religion, which is what those who oppose this on religious grounds are seeking. I can assure you that no one voice speaks for all of Christianity on this issue. Many Christian scholars agree that there is no good argument in scripture or tradition to support a religious argument for exclusion of any who are not heterosexual or cis-gendered. And even if there were any reasonable argument to do so within the institution of the church, there is clearly no convincing argument for discrimination to be the law of the land. For example, while I disagree with those within the church who prohibit women from teaching or holding authority over men, even those who hold such views draw the line on enforcing that behavior when they leave church and enter society. This issue should be no different.

I have been fortunate in my experience to be among those who have not felt the sting of discrimination. So I am here as an ally who has been blessed by the gifts that come from inclusion. My experience and the experience in our church has been that inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community not only has not harmed, but, in fact, has greatly enhanced our lives together. I hope that you will see the wisdom of providing this legal protection as not only the proper moral choice but in the best interest of enhancing our society.

Thank you for taking the time to receive my testimony. I'm glad to answer any questions you may have.