

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking member Clyde, and the members of the Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, we are Bradley Miner, Jack Legg, Rick Incorvati, and Kent Brooks, the elected officers speaking on behalf of Equality Springfield, a group based in Springfield, OH.

We strongly support the legislation being considered, HB 160

HB 160 is very important to us because it seeks to increase the safety and sustainability of our city of Springfield, as well as the state of Ohio, by protecting every person against any form of discrimination. We believe that the most basic and fundamental way to care for our neighbor is to make sure our neighbor is safe from potential harm. This is why Equality Springfield has made it our mission for the past seven years to seek a greater Springfield by welcoming and appreciating LGBTQ+ people. LGBTQ+ people play a visible role in the life of our community, and they offer vital talent and resources which are necessary for the strength and health of our community.

In Springfield, OH, it is legal for a person to be fired from their job because of their identity as an LGBTQ+ person. For the citizens of Springfield, there is no ordinance protecting against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Local groups, including our local Human Relations Board, have urged the City Commission to add language to Springfield's anti-discrimination ordinance to extend protections to LGBTQ+ people, but this has not been enacted. This is why HB 160 is so important to us. Many of our friends and neighbors are vulnerable and at risk. There is a gap in protection for LGBTQ+ members of our community. For the equal protection and benefit of all people, we feel the pressing need to extend security to all people and safeguard against discrimination based on sexuality and gender identity as soon as possible.

Across the United States, over 150 cities have passed non-discrimination laws similar to HB 160, including 20 cities in Ohio. These cities have acted to ensure the health and safety of every person in their midst, and also because they have seen the importance of such legislation when it comes to attracting skilled workers and keeping them in the area. Sadly, the city of Springfield has no such protections at this time. The state of Ohio must act on HB 160 to close the gap.

Like many cities across Ohio, Springfield is locked in an ongoing effort to revitalize the economy of our town, seeking to attract new businesses and create new jobs. Springfield must remain competitive or risk missing irreplaceable opportunities. The same is true for the state of Ohio. To succeed, we will need the talents and resources of all Ohioans, seeking out the best and brightest from all walks of life. Therefore, we must seek inclusive protections which extend to all Ohioans. Every single citizen of Ohio should feel safe and welcome.

It is no secret that businesses all across Ohio are recognizing the dire need for anti-discrimination protections for workers. This is why more than 150 businesses have joined the Ohio Business Competes Coalition in support of a statewide policy prohibiting discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. We believe Ohio means jobs... but we must ask ourselves: what corporations might

avoid locating their business here due to lack of protections for their talented employees? How many skilled workers might choose to live in neighboring states where they know they will have protection under the law?

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of HB 160. We find that it is fundamental to our democracy that all are created and treated equal by all and that no one should be discriminated against. This legislation would enshrine that into law and provide a remedy to those discriminated against.

Signed,

Jack Legg, President of Equality Springfield

Bradley Miner, Vice President of Equality Springfield

Kent Brooks, Secretary of Equality Springfield

Rick Incorvati, Treasurer of Equality Springfield