

Chair Blessing III, Vice Chair Reineke, ranking minority member Clyde, and the members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, my name is Dr. Chad Schneider. I support the legislation, House Bill 160, being considered.

A dear friend of mine from college used to talk to me about his struggles growing up in Ohio. As a teenager living in a small community, he agonized over his sexual orientation. He told me he knew he was gay from very early on in his childhood. He remembered being a child and wondering why he was attracted to boys and not girls, like his brothers were. He did not choose to be gay. He just knew he was. That was his orientation, his genetic make-up, his God-given identity. He was not able to express this identity in his home town because of fear of ridicule and castigation. He tried to suppress it, but he was fighting against his own nature. This was who he was, and how he was built. But he was made to feel like he was less deserving, and somehow less of a person, and so he suffered greatly, and he became suicidal in high school.

Only later when he attended a large university did he finally find some liberty and happiness. His orientation was supported. He was treated as a person. He was left alone to live, to pursue his studies, and to be himself with peers, both homosexual and heterosexual. This freedom allowed him to participate in our college community as a productive citizen. But outside of our circle he still had to suffer prejudice and attacks on his civil liberties. He was afraid to eat in certain restaurants, frequent certain establishments, or shop in certain areas for fear of retribution, harassment, or physical harm, because someone might discover he is of a different orientation.

As I remember back on those conversations with him now, I think about the people on the street and in restaurants who informally harassed him, simply for being gay, and I wonder: What message is our government sending, if it allows public businesses to *formally* discriminate against my friend because of his God-given identity? What damage is it doing to the political philosophy and moral fabric of our country?

Our Declaration of Independence declares: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all persons are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Our great country was founded on this political philosophy. My life has been blessed and protected by this profound Declaration and the Constitution of the United States. I have never had to question why I am male, why I am white or why I am heterosexual. I walk into a bakery and I can ask for any wedding cake I want, because I am protected by civil liberties - because I am a U.S. Citizen. That is what I believe. But some believe I can ask for any wedding cake I choose because I am a heterosexual. In past decades, others believed I could eat in any restaurant I chose or sit at the front of the bus, because I was white. Those people were wrong. We as a country knew it was wrong. So, we changed it. Why? Because we knew it did not matter what the color of your skin was. It mattered that you were a citizen of this country, and being a citizen means we all have certain unalienable rights, one of which is the right to eat in any restaurant regardless of skin color.

Now we are tasked with righting another wrong. All of us have certain unalienable rights, one of which is the right to buy a wedding cake to celebrate a union between two citizens of this country regardless of orientation. They also have a right to eat in a restaurant, ride at the front of a bus and frequent public businesses. The U.S. constitution gives us rights regardless of our genetic constitution. We are all

endowed with rights to Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness regardless of our physical make-up, orientation and God-given identity. We hold these truths to be self-evident. Do not let these truths be trampled. Please change this for my friend, and for all my friends in the LGBTQ community, as we did before for others several decades ago. It was the right thing to do then. It is the right thing to do now. It is what our Constitution and Declaration of Independence tell us to do. The truth really is self-evident. Thank you.