

Written testimony submitted to the Ohio House in support of HB 160

Subodh Chandra

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Chairman Blessing and members of the committee:

As the founder and managing partner of The Chandra Law Firm LLC in Cleveland, my small business and I support the Ohio Fairness Act and its goal of protecting Ohioans regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. My firm has worked with many LGBTQ clients over the years, and we have seen first-hand the impact that discrimination has on them. The mental and physical toll of being treated like second-class citizens weighs as heavily on the LGBTQ community as it does for those Ohio has already protected from discrimination under existing law. They deserve the same protections.

Beyond caring for my clients, I also support the Ohio Fairness Act as a small-business owner. Equal-employment opportunity for all Ohioans creates a meritocracy and makes Ohio's economy and productivity stronger. Researchers from Harvard University have estimated that half the increase in economic productivity from 1959 to 2006 came from increases in labor quality and efficiency. That growth in productivity is the basic source of increases in real wages and living standards, and it is driven in part by legal and environmental conditions, including the enforcement of civil-rights laws and changes in social norms.

Adapting to these changes can cut average total costs for businesses. Higher unit labor costs lead to higher inflation, but opening up the labor force to LGBTQ Ohioans on equal terms with equal protections can help contain those costs and improve economic efficiency, for both the firms that hire them and the rest of the state.

While our country was founded on principles of equality and progress, our union was imperfect and it did not initially protect the LGBTQ community's rights, just as it initially did not protect the rights of women and people of color. But 92 years after our nation's founding, we had made enough progress to abolish slavery and recognize the rights of citizenship on equal terms, regardless of race. Another 54 years later, we recognized women's right to vote on equal terms. Since then, we have made countless advancements in the legal protections available to citizens who are—for whatever irrational reason—targeted for discrimination.

In the Ohio General Assembly, you have already recognized and struck back against those who would shut Ohioans out of the workforce based on their race, color, religion, sex, military status, national origin, disability, age, and ancestry. It is 2017, and it is time to expand those protections to include those who are targeted for discrimination and excluded from employment because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

I urge the House to pass HB 160 and protect individuals regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Thank you for considering this testimony.

Sincerely,

Subodh Chandra
Managing Partner
The Chandra Law Firm LLC