

House Bill 176
Proponent Testimony
Ohio House of Representatives
State Government Committee
Wednesday, June 17, 2009
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Beavercreek, Ohio

Good Afternoon Chairman Gerberry, Ranking Member Daniels, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on HB 176. My name is Dr. Juli Burnell. I live in Beavercreek and work primarily in Dayton, now as psychology faculty for the University of Dayton and the School of Professional Psychology at Wright State and for 17 years prior as a psychologist in the Counseling Center at the University of Dayton. Over my years as a psychotherapist, I have seen the damage that can be done by discrimination perpetuated against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals simply for being who they are. I was moved to come to speak with you today after two former clients contacted me, each reporting incidences of discrimination that had occurred within the last month that would be made illegal by HB 176, the Equal Housing and Employment Act.

I was here for Equality Ohio's Lobby Day last month, & I enjoyed talking with my state representative, Jarrod Martin. During our conversation he asked for examples of discrimination that have occurred recently in this state. So when in the past month, two former clients independently spoke to me of the devastation these types of injustices have perpetrated on their lives, it felt important to make these instances known. The first client was fired from her job in a vet's office in Xenia-- her boss said that he had heard that she was gay & that he felt that his clients wouldn't appreciate their "family values being challenged by her presence" (even

though his clients had loved her for 2 years & he admitted that he had no problems with her work). In the second case, a young woman who had been renting a house in Beavercreek for 4 years (& who had done landscaping, etc at her own expense--- loving the house as her own) was told that her lease wasn't being renewed because the landlord had heard about her & didn't rent to "her type". I was saddened to tell both these clients that while I understood their pain, to my knowledge they had no legal recourse. In the first client's case, she at least became angry at this injustice-- a healthy response, albeit one that could cause her to disengage from some other people-- & one I was glad to see. However, the second client responded with signs of depression & has indicated that there's little reason to try again to make a nice home "when it can just be taken away from (her)".

Neither of these women saw any point in reporting these cases to anyone as there was no legal support for their positions. I really can't say I blame them. As a psychologist, some of the most debilitating pain I have seen people suffer through has been in situations where they have experienced unfair treatment just because of some fundamental aspect of who they are, particularly since the consequences are beyond their control. The two women I spoke about earlier are very representative of the reactions of many of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, & transgender clients with whom I have worked who have suffered discrimination. And so many of these cases never come to light beyond the therapy office because of the fear and hopelessness these discriminatory acts engender. It's easy to think of these as "regrettable but temporary injustices", but in fact the long term effects of such experiences can linger on in the form of depression, erosion of self esteem, withdrawal from relationships, or even mistrust of parts of society to name but a few.

Four years ago, after much thoughtful discussion, the University of Dayton expanded its employment non-discrimination policy to include sexual orientation. Though there were some initial concerns about including a group who was not a required federally protected class, the University concluded that as a Catholic institution led by a Marianist commitment to social justice and believing in the "worth and dignity of each individual", they could not do otherwise. In addition, they had recently lost two top faculty candidates, both of whom cited the absence of such a policy as part of their reasoning for declining the offers. Such a situation is not unique to the University of Dayton. Ohio employers and communities who choose not to make explicit their commitment to non-discrimination based on sexual orientation often automatically remove themselves from consideration by talented and tax-paying gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

I hope that when you consider the impact of the injustices about which I have spoken, that you will want to send a clear message to ALL of Ohio's citizens that it is not acceptable to fire or evict people simply for being who they are!! It seems to me that no matter what your religious or political affiliations, if you believe that every human being has the right to attempt to develop to his or her full potential, that you will support this opportunity by voting in favor of HB 176.