

Will Ohio Pass A Law To Protect LGBTQ Rights?

October 3, 2017 | [Employment Discrimination](#), [Labor And Employment](#)



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There has been widespread activity in the U.S. Courts of Appeals in 2017 regarding whether Title VII includes sexual orientation as one of its protected classes, but the answer is still unresolved on a national level. In an effort to provide protections where federal law does not necessarily do so, 20 states and the District of Columbia have banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment settings. However, Ohio is not one of those 20 states, and past efforts to amend Ohio's civil rights laws have failed. Now, a new effort to protect LGBTQ rights under Ohio law is underway as Rep. Nickie Antonio has introduced House Bill 160, which would ban discrimination on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing and public accommodations. Proponents of the bill have made the traditional arguments in support of such legislation – that all individuals deserve equal rights in employment and housing settings. What stands out for this bill is the number of proponents who also support the bill for economic reasons. Ohio Business Competes is a nonpartisan coalition of more than 200 businesses, both large and small, from all over Ohio that backs the bill. The argument is that Ohio will more easily attract investment from businesses and recruit and retain more top talent if it makes all workers feel welcome. It is worth noting that 19 municipalities in Ohio, including Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dayton, Akron, Toledo, and Youngstown, already have nondiscrimination ordinances that prohibit sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination. It remains to be seen whether Ohio will make those prohibitions statewide.

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