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Ohio Lawmaker Says LGBT Anti-Discrimination Bill Now Has Corporate Support

By Andy Chow

A Democratic state lawmaker says if Ohio wants to become more appealing as a place to move a business or to move a family, it must create protections for LGBTQ people. There could be new momentum for a bill that has stalled several times in the last decade.

State Rep. Nickie Antonio says this month will mark the first time the proposal to protect LGBTQ people from employment and housing discrimination, [HB 160](#) which also known as the Ohio Fairness Act, has received more than one hearing.

According to [Ohio law](#), it's illegal for businesses to fire employees based on things like race, religion, sex, or disability status "without just cause," but it is technically legal to fire someone for being gay or transgender.

Opponents have argued that there's no need for state law because private businesses and cities already have their own policies, but Antonio calls that mere patchwork.

"We should live in a state where someone can work in one community but decide to buy a home in another community and not have to look into their policies to find out whether or not their family would be welcomed there," Antonio said.

HB 160 has been floating around the Statehouse for 10 years, but it's gone nowhere before. Antonio was asked if she thought it might be time for the issue to go before voters, and replied that this is a human rights issue that should fall on policymakers.

"I do not believe that any group of people, who live in the minority should have to go to the majority population and supplicate for their rights," Antonio said. "I think that this state and this country can do better."

Antonio says though majority Republican lawmakers have not been supportive in the past, this time there's a heavyweight in her corner: the Ohio Chamber of Commerce. Antonio, the state's first openly lesbian lawmaker, says her bill would still include exemptions for religious organizations.

In September, the nonpartisan [Ohio Business Competes](#) launched a campaign to ask businesses to commit to nondiscrimination policies. And the [Human Rights Campaign](#) last year ranked major Ohio corporations as among the best when it comes to equal treatment in the workplace.

<http://radio.wosu.org/post/ohio-lawmaker-says-lgbt-anti-discrimination-bill-now-has-corporate-support>