

House State Government Committee

June 3, 2009

Mayor Warren R. Copeland, Springfield, Ohio

Proponent Testimony

House Bill 176

When the Springfield City Commission was asked to consider passing a local antidiscrimination ordinance like the one before you, we had two questions. Does this have anything to do with marriage, and can we enforce it if we pass it. We were fully satisfied that it did not have anything to do with marriage, which eased the concerns of some commissioners. However, we were not convinced that we would be able to enforce it effectively. As a result we decided to express support for the legislation before you because we believe that our citizens should have the protections built into it. However, we chose not to pass a local ordinance because we did not feel we had the administrative capacity to enforce it effectively. Let me explain.

The City of Springfield has had a human relations ordinance since the 1960s. For years, we tried to enforce it ourselves. Given the size of our administration, this was a significant strain on our people. A large part of the problem was that we were not a large enough community to have a steady supply of cases. We would go without complaints requiring investigation for a significant period of

time and then all of a sudden we would have more than our staff could handle for a period of time.

As a result we entered into an agreement over twenty years ago with the Ohio Civil Rights Commission by which they investigate complaints for us. This works well because many cases are filed with both of us sooner or later anyway. In addition, they have enough staff and enough volume that they can manage the flow of complaints much better than we could. We then reassigned the staff who had been doing the investigations previously, and they have since retired. I assume a similar arrangement makes sense for cities of our size or smaller and probably for many somewhat larger than us.

If the General Assembly passes this legislation, the Ohio Civil Rights Commission would be empowered to protect the rights of our citizens experiencing discrimination in employment or housing because of their sexual orientation or gender identity just as it has for other of our citizens in the past. In turn, this would allow us to include these protections in our agreement with the Ohio Civil Rights Commission. As you consider this legislation, I hope you will take into account the particular help it will provide to communities like ours who are not large enough to effectively protect these rights by ourselves.