

Fact Sheet

Discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Washingtonians, and the Anderson-Murray Anti-Discrimination Bill

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Discrimination

Does the public support anti-discrimination laws for LGBT persons?

Yes.

- A recent Harris poll found that most Americans support employment anti-discrimination laws for lesbians and gays – only 30% are against them. Washingtonians, with our strong tradition of individual rights, are even more likely to approve of LGBT anti-discrimination laws.
- Cities all across Washington State have already passed basic protections for gays and lesbians. The cities of Seattle, Tacoma, Des Moines, Olympia, Pullman, Vancouver and other cities have non-discrimination policies; so do Clallam, Clark, Snohomish and King Counties. About 50% of state residents are covered through these local jurisdictions. This creates a patchwork of discrimination protection across our state. Under this system, one could easily be protected from discrimination at home, but not at work. Worse yet, thousands of LGBT people have no protection from discrimination at all.
- 15 other states (covering over one-third of the US population) already have similar laws. This includes Nevada, Wisconsin, and New Hampshire; Illinois passed its law this year.

Does discrimination really occur against LGBT persons in Washington State?

Yes.

- A recent survey of LGBT Seattle residents found that 52% felt they had experienced discrimination, 25% of them within the past year, and 28% reported that this discrimination occurred outside the city of Seattle, but inside Washington State.
- A recent Human Rights Campaign report detailed discrimination against several LGBT Washingtonians. This includes one case that went through the state's court system (*Webb v. Puget Sound Broadcasting*). In that case, the court found that, *specifically due to the fact that lesbians and gays were not included in state law*, the plaintiff could be fired simply because he was gay.
- Many gays and lesbians are afraid to come forward with their cases based upon their past experiences. They fear that current employers will react negatively to past employment problems. In one heart-wrenching case, a woman wanted to come forward but was fearful that her ongoing attempt to co-adopt her partner's child would be jeopardized. These are the fears of people lacking legal protection from discrimination.

The Anti-Discrimination Bill:

What does the Anderson-Murray Anti-Discrimination Bill really do?

The Anti-Discrimination Bill adds the words 'sexual orientation' to the following list of categories under the jurisdiction of the state's Human Rights Commission: race, creed, color, national origin, families with children, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, age, or the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a disabled person. Persons are not to be discriminated against based on any of these attributes in employment, in credit and insurance transactions, in places of public resort, accommodation, or amusement, and in real property transactions.

Won't churches be forced to hire outside their beliefs?

No.

- Religious organizations are already exempt from the current law and continue to be under the Anti-Discrimination Bill.

Won't it increase costs to businesses, especially small businesses, including more lawsuits?

No.

- Small businesses (under 8 persons) are already exempted from this law and continue to be under the Anti-Discrimination Bill.
- According to the most recent US Government Accounting Office report on litigation related to LGBT employment discrimination (in those states that have laws protecting LGBT persons), there has been no overall increase in total discrimination cases filed. LGBT-related discrimination accounted on average for 3.5% of cases filed.
- Many major Washington employers have already embraced LGBT employees, by offering domestic partner benefits and/or ensuring that their employment non-discrimination policies include gays and lesbians. This includes Weyerhaeuser, Microsoft, Safeco, Starbucks, Costco, and hundreds of other Washington employers, large and small.
- Recent research from economic development expert Professor Richard Florida revealed that those cities with the largest gay and lesbian populations also had the most dynamic, expanding economies.

Isn't this a step towards same-sex marriage?

No. Passing the Anderson-Murray Anti-Discrimination Bill has nothing to do with marriage. Other states that have passed LGBT anti-discrimination bills also have state "Defense of Marriage" laws.

References

- Full Text of the Anti-Discrimination Bill / HB 1515: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/pub/billinfo/2005-06/Htm/Bills/House%20Bills/1515.htm>
- GAO Sexual Orientation report: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d02878r.pdf>
- Harris Poll: http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=236
- HRC Workplace Discrimination report: <http://www.hrc.org/Template.cfm?Section=Resources1&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=11134>
- Richard Florida. *Rise of the Creative Class*. Basic Books. 2002.
- HRC private employer policies: http://www.hrc.org/Template.cfm?Section=Search_the_Database&Template=/CustomSource/WorkNet/srch.cfm&searchtypeid=1&searchSubTypeID=1
- Seattle Commission on Sexual Minorities report: http://cityofseattle.net/scsm/documents/02_survey_results-posted.pdf

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