



April 7, 2017

Sen. Berta Gardner
State Capitol, Room 9
Juneau, AK. 99801

Re: SB 72

Dear Senator Gardner,

SAGE Alaska would like to thank you for sponsoring SB 72 and to thank the members of the Committee for considering this bill. As our name states, SAGE (Services and Advocacy for Gay Elders) Alaska is committed to addressing the needs of older LGBT people and to advocating for policy changes that affect those needs. We want to ensure that the older LGBT community can age with a sense of security, dignity, confidence and well-being.

While the struggle for equality has advanced over the last few decades, it is far from over. For older LGBT individuals, there are still memories of times of hiding, fear for safety, and the heartbreak of rejection by family, friends, workplaces, and even their church. For many, the scars of struggle will remain and affect many aspects of their later life experience. Some will remain "in the closet" forever, regardless of laws protecting specific status, as laws do not dictate personal beliefs nor attitudes, as only time and relationships can work open hearts and minds.

National studies estimate the population of LGBT seniors will double by the year 2030 and unfortunately, many in that population deal with poverty and reduced economic security as well as significant health disparities related to physical and mental health issues. Our lack of non-discrimination protections for all LGBT peoples, raises risk factors for social isolation in disproportionate ways. Older LGBT people are twice as likely to live alone, and 3-4 times less likely to have children, and many are estranged from their biological families. Many mainstream providers do not account for the unique realities and needs of older adults, leaving them at risk for isolation, neglect and further discrimination.

Aging is stressful enough without the additional stress that discrimination can cause. No one should have to live their life in fear of being denied services or housing because of who they are. It is time for all Alaskans to be treated fairly and we strongly support SB 72 and hope to see it become reality in the near future.

Respectfully,
Julie Schmidt
Program Director
529-6725

P.O. Box 200070

Anchorage, AK 99520

EIN 92-0091087

