



February 11, 2022

Honorable Matt Claman, Chair
House Judiciary Committee
Alaska State Legislature
State Capital
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Support for House Bill 17 – Prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

Dear Chair Claman and members of the Judiciary Committee,

Alaskans Together for Equality (Alaskans Together) fully supports making all Alaskans equal and protected from discrimination through passing House Bill (HB) 17: "An act adding to the powers and duties of the State Commission for Human Rights, and relating to and prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity or expression."

Alaskans Together represents hundreds of members across the state of Alaska. We are a statewide, nonpartisan civil rights organization whose mission is to advance civil equality for all Alaskans through grassroots organizing and advocacy, with a primary focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) Alaskans. We advocate for all Alaskans because we understand the more robust the foundation of equal civil rights across institutions and practices makes for a better Alaska. All Alaskans should be enabled to take advantage of opportunities to create healthy lives and produce income that allows for a stronger state and healthy well-being.

Alaskans Together believes that HB17 is imperative to securing all Alaskans' rights and opportunities and provides the tools to pursue those opportunities. As Alaska continues to weather economic and COVID-19 related challenges, it is imperative that the state do all it can to attract and retain a skilled and diverse labor force. The passage of this bill will go a long way in strengthening not only our workforce but also our families.

Communities across the state have already taken the first steps, and now it's time for the state to follow. Municipalities like Anchorage, Juneau, Sitka, and Bethel (for employees) have already passed local inclusive anti-discrimination ordinances. If HB17 is passed, Alaska wouldn't be the first state to have such a law on its books. It would be joining 21 states and the

District of Columbia in protecting its people from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, and public accommodations.

We urge you to support justice, fairness, and equality for all Alaskans by supporting HB17. With this bill's passage, the Alaska legislature ensures the right for individual Alaskans to work, innovate, and contribute to our state. HB17 is integral to meeting Alaska's economic challenges. Its passage would send a strong message to Alaska's LGBTQ community and those talented LGBTQ individuals and their families who are considering making Alaska their home, that our state is a welcoming state to all.

We look forward to the next hearing on this bill. After years of waiting for this bill to become law, we hope you and your colleagues take this first step by passing this bill through this committee and also encourage your fellow legislators to move this bill to the House floor for a vote. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it also aligns with our Alaskan values of fairness and equality for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Rojas', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Elias Rojas
Board President

CC: Alaskans Together Board



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN®

House Judiciary Committee
Alaska State Capitol Building
120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

February 14, 2022

Dear Chair Claman and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Sarah Warbelow, and I am the Legal Director for the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBTQ people and realize a world that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. On behalf of our over three million members and supporters nationwide, I am writing you today in support of House Bill (HB) 17, which would extend statewide nondiscrimination protections to LGBTQ Alaskans in employment, housing, and public accommodations.

America has a proud history of valuing liberty, freedom, and hard work. Anti-discrimination laws put those values into practice. By expanding the state's civil rights laws to include LGBTQ people, Alaska will send a strong message that all of its residents matter. It is time to ensure that discrimination does not trump merit or basic fairness by extending protections to include sexual orientation and gender identity.

Discrimination against LGBTQ people continues to be a very real problem. Far too often, LGBTQ Americans have lost their livelihoods simply because of an employer's fear, lack of understanding, or intolerance. Some are highly skilled professionals who, though seemingly irreplaceable in their positions, suddenly become expendable when they wish to live openly in their communities or are outed by colleagues. Others are people forced into whatever jobs they can find, some scraping together money for the tremendous medical costs of gender transition, which are oftentimes not covered by health insurance. They are people in every walk of life—doctors and lawyers, plumbers and bus drivers. Many are parents and spouses, whose efforts to find secure, fulfilling employment are also a struggle to provide for their families. And for these Americans, the threat of discrimination does not end once they leave the workplace. It is well-documented that LGBTQ people are shown less desirable properties for purchase or rent, receive less favorable customer service, or encounter outright refusal of service. The time has long since passed when we as a nation ought to tolerate arbitrary discrimination against any group of people, in any aspect of life.

I cannot overstate the real-life implications this bill would have for Alaska. It would extend vital protections in the most fundamental aspects of life to all Alaskans. Moreover, this bill would send an unequivocal message to businesses that Alaska is a place where they can find the best and brightest; where their employees can live, grow, and thrive without fear of discrimination.

Finally, passing HB 17 will place the state in good company. Beginning with an ordinance passed in Minneapolis in 1975, 21 states, the District of Columbia, and more than 300 cities and counties have enacted fully-inclusive, comprehensive laws prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Recently, states from Florida to Kansas have adopted the Supreme Court's reasoning in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, finding that federal sex nondiscrimination law also prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, to ensure that LGBTQ people have state level nondiscrimination protections. Additionally, more than 1,100 private businesses across the United States, including 94% of Fortune 500 companies, have voluntarily adopted policies that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. It is clear that employers and governments nationwide agree that they are at their best—their most competitive and most productive—when they do the right thing and affirm that they're open to everyone.

It has never been more important for Alaska to act and ensure that discrimination has no place in this great state. Please vote in favor of HB 17.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Warbelow". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sarah Warbelow, Legal Director
Human Rights Campaign



To: Members of the House Judiciary Committee

From: Joelle Hall, President of the Alaska AFL-CIO

Date: February 18, 2022

Subject: HB 17 - DISCRIMINATION: GENDER ID.;SEXUAL ORIENT.

The Alaska AFL-CIO supports HB 17 on the following grounds:

Fairness and Equal Opportunity: The labor movement has always stood for fairness and equal opportunity. Collective bargaining as an idea rests on the principle that everyone must come together to achieve a common goal, regardless of background. We firmly believe that everyone, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, deserves the right to access education, eat at restaurants, visit hotels, participate in government programs, and of course work without discrimination. We are also strongly against discriminating through wages between men and women for comparable work, which this bill addresses. Our society is built to reward hard work. Americans believe that if you work hard, hone your craft, and are successful at what you do, then you will succeed. In order for this to be true, we must apply that belief equally across all of society, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

Protecting Workers' Rights, Health, and Safety: We champion efforts to strengthen workers' rights through worker protections. In the workplace, one in four employees reports that LGBTQ workers are treated unfairly, and nearly half say they have heard anti-LGBTQ comments on the job, with nearly two-thirds of LGBTQ Americans reporting having experienced discrimination in their personal lives. The Human Rights Campaign reported that nearly 50% of LGBTQ Americans are in the closet at work because they fear retaliation. We want all working people and their families to feel safe and welcome in their workplaces and communities.

Non-Discrimination Policies are Good for Our Economy: Alaska must be able to recruit and retain talented individuals from all backgrounds in order to remain competitive. 96% of top Fortune 500 companies include sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies. And most of these Fortune 500 companies are located in states with strong non-discrimination policies. Additional economic benefits to non-discrimination policies include the following: diversified consumer base, increased generation of ideas and innovation, and improved employee relations and morale. ¹

¹ Economic Motives for Adopting LGBT-Related Workplace Policies (The Williams Institute, 2011)



NATIVE MOVEMENT

Building Healthy & Sustainable Communities

www.nativemovement.org

March 3, 2022

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Native Movement respectfully urges members of the committee to vote to **PASS HB 17: Discrimination Based on Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation** at the next possible opportunity. Native Movement is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to building people power, rooted in an Indigenized worldview, toward healthy, sustainable, and just communities for all. We support HB 17 because codified protections for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (2S/LGBTQ) Alaskans is a long-overdue step that needs to be taken towards creating safety and justice for **all** marginalized Alaskans.

Alaska is one of 29 states that has no statutory protections against discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation¹. Despite the landmark decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, recent data show that one in ten 2S/LGBTQ Americans continued to encounter workplace discrimination since the pandemic began in 2020². What this suggests is that states without codified statutory protections aren't being held accountable to enforcing the supreme law of the land, leaving 2S/LGBTQ people without any real options for redress.

Imagine, then, what 2S/LGBTQ Alaskans are experiencing every day when only four localities in the entire state have adopted non-discrimination ordinances on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation³. This means that over half of 2S/LGBTQ Alaskans are made vulnerable to the personal preferences of others, and that the State of Alaska is failing to protect and treat all Alaskans equally – a gross mistreatment of justice, especially when there is broad public support among Alaskans for non-discrimination protections⁴.

Native Movement urges members of the committee to join us in our work of creating just and sustainable communities for all, and grant Alaskans overdue protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Respectfully,

Charlene Apok, PhD

Charlene Aqpiq Apok, Ph.D.
Gender Justice & Healing Director
Native Movement

¹ <https://freedomforallamericans.org/category/ak/>

² <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-workplace-discrimination/>

³ <https://freedomforallamericans.org/category/ak/>

⁴ <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Employment-Discrimination-AK-Jul-2015.pdf>



NAACP Anchorage Unit # 1000
(National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)
Kevin D. McGee, President

Saturday, February 12, 2022

SUBJECT: HB 17

Alaska House Judiciary Committee

Dear House Judiciary Committee Members,

The NAACP Anchorage Branch the State of Alaska's African-American civil rights organization, supports House Bill 17, the proposed state LGBTQ anti-discrimination bill that would add LGBTQ protections to Alaska's existing statewide anti-discrimination law.

"We support what it does — and we support it now"

The NAACP Anchorage Branch was chartered in 1951. Founders such as John W. Thomas, Blanch McSmith, Clarence and Flossie Coleman, Joseph M. Jackson, John S. Parks and Mr. and Mrs. Richard Watts were spurred into action when the dream home of an African American was burned to the ground before he could move into an all-white neighborhood.

The NAACP, which was founded in 1909, was instrumental in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex and national origin; enforced desegregation of schools and the right to vote; and required equal access to public places and employment.

We believe the same protections that we have worked for so hard over the 110 years of the NAACP now should be extended to all Alaskans, particularly members of the LGBTQ community.

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the struggle continues ...



The NAACP, Anchorage supports LGBTQ discrimination protections in the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) and in the Affordable Care Act. The group also has supported expanding hate crimes legislation to cover crimes committed because of a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Anyone who purports to care about the well-being of Black people must care about all of us all of the time. At a time when our community is under attack by occupants of the highest offices in parts of the country as well as the lowest depths of hatred and bigotry, it is noteworthy that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is taking meaningful steps toward intersectional social justice.

Too many people think that the gains made by the white lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community are eroding civil protections for Black people and these people miss the fact that as long as there have been Black people there have been Black LGBTQ and same gender loving (SGL) people.

Black LGBTQ/SGL people are vulnerable to discrimination and dying at a disproportionate rate and this does not have to be our reality.

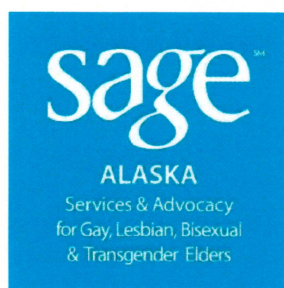
Support and passage of HB 17 is just another chapter in doing the right thing.

Respectfully,

Kevin D. McGee

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the struggle continues ...



February 20, 2022

House Judiciary Committee
Alaska State Legislature
State Capital
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: HB 17 - An act prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

Dear House Judiciary Committee,

SAGE Alaska offers our appreciation to all of the sponsors of HB 17. SAGE's policy is that it is the fundamental right of all people to be free from discrimination, including discrimination based on a person's sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. Discrimination toward LGBTQ individuals is historically well documented and ranges from mild harassment to violence and hate crimes. But I wish to provide yet another aspect of the importance of non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ individuals. Nationally, SAGE (Services and Advocacy for LGBTQ Elders) has undertaken a partnership with AARP to help shine a light on the little-understood situation LGBTQ individuals face as they grow old.

In short, the very unfortunate choice older LGBTQ individuals must face is whether they must go "back in the closet." As people age, we typically experience a series of losses that create varying degrees of dependency on others, and a consequent sense of vulnerability. The need to feel safe (including the need for respect and dignity) increases when having to depend on persons or systems other than oneself. While research on the experience of older LGBTQ individuals is only now beginning to describe their situation, results show some patterns that underscore the need for increased protection. We know, for instance, that LGBTQ older adults are:

- Five times less likely to access senior services
- Experience higher poverty rates than senior heterosexual counterparts
- Significantly more likely to delay or not seek needed medical care
- More likely to have problems with substance abuse
- At higher risk for cancer and other serious health conditions (including depression)
- Half as likely as heterosexual elders to have family members to call for help and are three times less likely to have children.
- Hesitant to disclose sexual orientation to their primary care provider

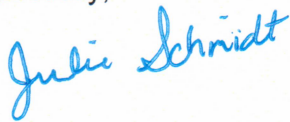
Many of these disparities can be attributed to the effects of historical prejudice, including disruption to families (who are so necessary to our long-term care system), and diminished opportunities to earn a living and save for retirement (often due to lifelong employment discrimination). Ongoing stigma often interferes with full participation in community and society, leaving a significant number of LGBTQ older adults reluctant to seek needed services and support from potentially hostile aging and health service providers. Almost a third of gay and lesbian Baby Boomers identify discrimination as their greatest concern about aging as if aging were not concerning enough!

The experience of discrimination over a lifetime (remember that today's LGBTQ elders could have been a victim of violence or seen their expressions of love labeled a psychiatric disorder, a criminal activity, anti-family, immoral, and a security risk) takes a toll and predisposes to be highly vigilant and cautious. When faced with the vulnerabilities of long-term care, one might have to "sweep the house" of all evidence if a home health aide is due to pay a visit; or if living in an assisted living home or nursing home, one would have to make continuous decisions about whether this person or that one, whether staff or other residents, might be safe enough with whom to share the stories of one's life. For all persons coming to the end of life, the story of that life is among the most precious things a person has. It is hard to imagine the sense of loss and grief if that story had to be kept secret or denied. Furthermore, to live in a dependent care situation might have implications about visitors for the LGBTQ elder, or whether those friends would feel comfortable coming into that environment to visit...all of which has the potential to increase an unnecessary sense of loneliness and isolation.

The protections most people take for granted are urgently needed for LGBTQ older adults, especially public accommodations, which would include senior centers, health care facilities, assisted living homes, and skilled nursing facilities. No one should have to feel unsafe when they are old and vulnerable, and when so few choices may remain. Nor should anyone have to hide their own life out of fear of what others might say or do. HB 17 is a long-needed and crucial part of Alaska's proud history of self-determination and respect for individual human beings.

SAGE Alaska offers our strong support for the passage of HB 17 out of committee. Please feel free to contact us if we can be helpful with any further information.

Respectfully,



Julie Schmidt, Director SAGE Alaska
907-529-6725
SAGE@identityinc.org