

April 6, 2017

Dear Representative Andy Josephson, Sponsor, and Representative Kreiss-Tomkins, Chair of the House State Affairs Committee:

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes in equality in education, housing, and employment for all persons regardless of their race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation or disability. In addition, the League supports the equalization of legal rights, obligations, and benefits available to same-gender couples with those available to heterosexual couples, including the right to marry under civil law. The League believes that one of government's responsibilities is to protect the rights of all its citizens. Therefore, the League of Women Voters of Alaska strongly supports HB 184, a bill to protect the rights of persons regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression.

The 1992 LWVUS Convention added language to their Equality of Opportunity position, making it clear that this position referred to "all persons, regardless of their race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation or disability." The League position focuses particularly on equal opportunity for education, housing, and employment, three important requirements for inclusion and survival in society. In late March, public testimony in the Senate on the companion bill to HB 184 gave evidence that the problem of discrimination is very real for citizens who identify as members of the LGBTQ community. The loss of jobs and/or housing and the threat of violence were just a few of the potential problems mentioned.

Although the League was formed initially to fight for women's suffrage, today the League's work has widened to include all citizens and the guarantee of equal opportunity and civil rights for all. A society is weakened when it excludes some of its citizens from full participation in the rights and opportunities afforded to only certain citizens. We urge the members of the House State Affairs Committee to consider the rights of all your constituents and pass HB 184 out of committee. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Pat Redmond, President LWVAK

Judy Andree, Vice-President

Marianne Mills, Past-President

Gail Knobf, Secretary

Carol Dickason, Treasurer

Hetty Barthel, Director

Diane Mathisen, Director

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Phyllis Tugman-Alexander, Director