



Tammie Willis speaks at the LGBTQ Town Hall at the Soldotna Public Library in Soldotna, Alaska, on Jan. 4, 2020. (Photo by Brian Mazurek/Peninsula Clarion)

Soldotna passes resolution in support of hate crime legislation

The resolution would add "sexual orientation and gender identity" as a factor considered at sentencing

By Brian Mazurek

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The Soldotna City Council passed a resolution Wednesday night declaring the city's support for legislation that would expand Alaska's hate crime laws to include crimes motivated by the victim's sexual orientation or gender identity.

[Resolution 2020-006](#), introduced by council member Jordan Chilson, passed the city council by a vote of five to one. The resolution is in support of [House Bill 198](#), which would add “sexual orientation and gender identity” to the list of aggravating factors considered at sentencing.

“A large number of states have already expanded their hate crime protections to include gender identity, and a majority of states have already expanded hate crime protections to include sexual orientation,” Chilson said. “This bill would simply expand our existing protection set to include those two provisions, which is why I am in support of this.”

Chilson also referred to two additional pieces of legislation while introducing the resolution, [House Bill 82](#) and [Senate Bill 147](#). The former is a bill that would allow the State Commission for Human Rights to investigate cases of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and the latter is a bill that would formally establish June as LGBTQ Pride Month for the State of Alaska.

Chilson said that while resolution 2020-006 could not be expanded to include support for those bills, he wanted to state his support for both pieces of legislation.

Some citizens spoke in support of the resolution during the meeting, including Tammie Willis. Willis is a local advocate for the LGBTQ community and is one of the organizers of the annual Soldotna Pride in the Park march. Willis experienced several instances of harassment at the end of last year, including being assaulted in her home in December by someone wielding a knife.

Willis believes that the harassment she faced was motivated by her sexual orientation, and the FBI is currently investigating the assault as a hate crime.

HB 198 was introduced by Rep. Andy Josephson, D-Anchorage, after a town hall in Soldotna addressed the attacks against Willis and other threats that LGBTQ individuals face in the community.

“This resolution means a lot to me because I have been personally affected,” Willis said. “But it also means a lot to me because there are a lot of people in this community and across Alaska that live in fear every day because of who they are.”

The only vote against adopting the resolution came from council member Dave Carey, who said at the meeting that he was unsure if Soldotna had “jurisdictional standing” on the issue.

“I definitely don’t disagree that either the borough or state or whomever might want to know our opinion,” Carey said. “But does our opinion mean anything?”

Carey went on to voice his concern about different groups being held to different standards in the eyes of the law, but said that the victim’s identity should be taken into consideration when determining restitution in criminal cases.

“There is no doubt in my mind that we could do better when it comes to criminal justice,” Carey said. “The rights of the accused, and the influence of race, gender, poverty and age, among other prospectives, needs to be looked at.”

Carey initially abstained from voting, but voted “no” after the city clerk determined that he could not abstain.

A copy of the resolution will be sent to Rep. Gary Knopp, R-Soldotna; Rep. Ben Carpenter, R-Nikiski; Rep. Sarah Vance, R-Homer; and Sen. Peter Micciche, R-Soldotna.

A full audio recording of the city council meeting can be found online at www.soldotna.org/government/listen-to-meetings.

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