

From: [Michele Vasquez](#)
To: [House State Affairs](#)
Subject: Re: I support HB 198
Date: Wednesday, February 5, 2020 7:37:03 PM

Dear Co-Chairs Fields and Kreiss-Tomkins and Members of the Committee:

My friend Tammie Willis was the victim of a hate crime in my community. I feel that the state of Alaska must do all that it can to protect our LGBTQ brothers and sisters. I write to you tonight in full support of HB 198, which will add sentencing aggravators for defendants found guilty of a crime that was motivated by hatred or animus towards a person based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

This is not about giving special protections or extra rights to a group of people, but rather providing more equity in the criminal justice system to those who are the victims of crimes simply because they are lesbian, gay, transgender or bi-sexual. Over the decades, we have added sentencing aggravators for race, creed and national origin, to name a few, so now is the time to provide the same to the LGBTQ community.

On the national level, crimes against LGBTQ people are on the rise. Of course, the statistics only include known crimes because many will simply not report it out of fear. Tammie was targeted for one reason only; she is gay. The note left on her truck was laced with homophobic language and threats of harm. The large rock thrown at her truck that damaged her windshield had the word "dyke" written on it, which is the same word used in the letter. Lastly, she was viscously assaulted in her own home by a man with a knife, and he would have killed her had the power not gone out in her neighborhood. This all happened over a very brief time period. She has moved out of her home and is currently residing at the KPC Residence Hall where she works. Tammie does not feel safe and I don't blame her.

We cannot stop violence in this country or state, but we can certainly try to deter it. One way we can do that is by adding language to increase sentencing for those who wish to commit violence against people based on sexual orientation and gender identity. I welcome the day when we no longer have to pass laws that protect certain groups of people. It is my fervent hope that the day will come when every human being is valued, accepted and treated the same and these laws are not necessary. Until that day comes, we must do what we can to protect people who are vulnerable. I ask you to support and vote for HB 198 and move it to the next committee.

Respectfully,

Michele Vasquez
Soldotna, AK

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