

Personal Statement in Support of HB 198
by Tammie Willis

On Nov. 14th, I found a note on my truck. It said, "Dumb ass dyke we don't want your gay libtard ass shit here so take it some where else before you get hurt!!!"

On Nov. 22nd, an object was thrown at my truck, shattering my windshield. I later learned the Soldotna police found a rock with the word "dyke" written on it at the location where this happened.

On Dec. 9th, things escalated to include an assault in my home where I was repeatedly cut with a knife and punched until almost my entire left side was covered in bruises. It took 20 staples and 2 stitches to put me back together and almost a month for the bruises to disappear. Still, I was lucky that morning because a power outage made it difficult for my assailant to see me otherwise the outcome would have, without a doubt, been much worse for me.

Since the assault, I have left my home in Sterling and moved into the residence hall at Kenai Peninsula College where I work. I rarely go out alone anymore and when I do go, it is for very short trips and usually in the company of a friend. I don't sleep well, have panic attacks in the dark and still wake up my wife up with my nightmares.

Since coming forward with my experiences, I have also learned the hard way why people often don't come forward with their stories. The outpouring of hatred seen on social media since my coming forward cuts deep just like the knife did. With every news story, every time I testify, every time I take a stand against what happened, there is a new outpouring of hate rhetoric and attempts to dismiss my experiences altogether.

At the same time, there has been an outpouring of support from people all over Alaska and from here in the community where I was hurt. This support was most clearly demonstrated on Jan. 4, when close to 200 people showed up to a town hall to discuss the safety of the LGBTQ community.

Religious leaders, community leaders, state leaders, and a room packed full of community members showed me that there were more people willing to stand against hate than I ever imagined. They came and they listened with their hearts open as members of the LGBTQ community and their allies shared their stories of bullying, harassment, violence, prejudice and loss due to issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

As a result of listening with hearts open, people came to understand that my experience is not the exception and that the reality of LGBTQ people living in Alaska includes many of them living with fear, harassment, and a threat violence.

In an ideal world where everyone was treated with respect and dignity, legislation like HB 198 and HB 82 would not be needed but our world is not there yet. Until it is, HB 198 sends a clear message from our leaders that hate and violence are not the values we share as a community. They are not Alaskan values, and they will not be tolerated.

Thank you for listening to me and thank you for your support of this important legislation. It means a lot to me personally as a member of the LGBTQ community.