

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE LABOR AND COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE

March 20, 2023

3:16 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Justin Ruffridge, Vice Chair
Representative Mike Prax
Representative Dan Saddler
Representative Stanley Wright
Representative Ashley Carrick
Representative Zack Fields (via teleconference)

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Jesse Sumner, Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 56

"An Act exempting controlled substances prescribed or dispensed by a veterinarian to treat an animal from the requirements of the controlled substance prescription database."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 99

"An Act relating to and prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity or expression."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 56

SHORT TITLE: CONTROLLED SUB. DATA: EXEMPT ANIMAL RX

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) RUFFRIDGE

02/03/23	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/03/23	(H)	HSS, L&C
02/18/23	(H)	HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106
02/18/23	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
03/02/23	(H)	HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106
03/02/23	(H)	Heard & Held
03/02/23	(H)	MINUTE(HSS)
03/11/23	(H)	HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106

03/11/23 (H) Moved HB 56 Out of Committee
03/11/23 (H) MINUTE (HSS)
03/15/23 (H) HSS RPT 6DP
03/15/23 (H) DP: SUMNER, RUFFRIDGE, MCCORMICK,
SADDLER, MINA, PRAX
03/20/23 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124

BILL: HB 99

SHORT TITLE: DISCRIMINATION: GENDER ID.;SEXUAL ORIENT.

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) ARMSTRONG

03/08/23 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/08/23 (H) L&C, CRA, JUD
03/15/23 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
03/15/23 (H) <Bill Hearing Canceled>
03/17/23 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
03/17/23 (H) Heard & Held
03/17/23 (H) MINUTE (L&C)
03/20/23 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124

WITNESS REGISTER

BUD SEXTON, Staff
Representative Justin Ruffridge
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of Representative Ruffridge,
prime sponsor, presented HB 56 and gave the sectional analysis.

RACHEL BERNGARTT, DVM
Board of Veterinary Examiners
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered a PowerPoint presentation on HB
56, titled "Why It Makes Sense to Exempt Veterinarians."

TRACY WARD, DVM, Past President
Alaska State Veterinary Medical Association
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered a PowerPoint presentation on HB
56, titled "Why It Makes Sense to Exempt Veterinarians."

REPRESENTATIVE JENNIE ARMSTRONG
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, introduced HB 99.

JOSH SMITH, representing self

Chugiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided invited testimony in support of HB 99.

LYNN DAVIS, representing self

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided invited testimony in support of HB 99.

MAUREEN LONGWORTH, MD, representing self

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided invited testimony in support of HB 99.

HAYLEE MORRIS, Small Business Owner

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

MORGAN LIM, Lobbyist

Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates for Alaska

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

KASEY CASORT, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

ROSE O'HARA-JOLLEY, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

TARA LYNCH-HUSSLY (ph), representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

MARIAH BENNETT, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

MICHAEL CONTI, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

JAMIE GIBSON, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

TERRY SULLIVAN, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

MICHAEL GARVEY, Lobbyist
American Civil Liberties Union of AK
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

KEARSTYN "JAMES" COTTON, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

BROOKS BANKER, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

MENEKA THIRU, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

ALEX B. JOHNSON, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

PAIGE CHASE, representing self
Wasilla, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

NORA GECAN, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

JESSI SAIKI, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

CANYON KOKOCHURUK, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

JOHNNY ELLIOTT, representing self
Sitka, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

SARAH FIEDLER, representing self
Houston, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

MIKE COONS, President
Concerned Conservatives of Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 99.

ALEX BURY, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

JESSICA ROZATO, representing self
Denali, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

JOSHUA KNICELY, representing self
North Pole, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

ROBERT HOCKEMA, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

ZIA HETRICK, representing self
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

TIMOTHY ANDERSON, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

LISA MALONEY, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

KATE VEH, representing self
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

SUSAN BREZNICK, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

TITESUS EPSILON, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

ERINN BARNETT, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

ED MARTIN, representing self

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 99.

MICHAEL FLINT, representing self

Pride at Work, Alaska Chapter

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

DARCY COUGHLEN, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

CARLY JENSEN, representing self

Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

AMBER O'BRIEN, representing self

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

MERCEDES ARCINIEGA, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

JAINA WILLAHAN, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

MELISSA WHITE, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 99.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:16:19 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR JUSTIN RUFFRIDGE called the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:16 p.m. Representatives Saddler, Prax, Wright, Fields (via teleconference), and Ruffridge were present at the call to order. Representative Carrick arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 56-CONTROLLED SUB. DATA: EXEMPT ANIMAL RX

[3:17:24 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 56, "An Act exempting controlled substances prescribed or dispensed by a veterinarian to treat an animal from the requirements of the controlled substance prescription database."

[3:17:47 PM](#)

BUD SEXTON, Staff, Representative Justin Ruffridge, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Ruffridge, prime sponsor, introduced HB 56. He stated that the proposed legislation would exempt veterinarians from the requirements to report on the [Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP)]. He referenced the concern that when an individual brings a pet to a veterinary clinic, the pet owner's personal medical information is under review.

MR. SEXTON gave the sectional analysis for HB 56 [copy included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 1. AS 17.30.200(o) is amended to remove "and the Board of Veterinary Examiners" from the notification requirement when a practitioner registers with the database under (n) of this section.

Sec. 2. AS 17.30.200 is amended by adding a new subsection to read: This section does not apply to a schedule II, III, or IV controlled substance prescribed or dispensed by a veterinarian licensed under AS 08.98 to treat an animal.

Sec. 3. AS 08.98.050(a)(10) is repealed which removes the requirement for Veterinarians under the controlled substance prescription database.

[3:20:21 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:20 p.m. to 3:21 p.m.

[3:21:46 PM](#)

TRACY WARD, DVM, Past President, Alaska State Veterinary Medical Association (AKVMA), provided invited testimony on HB 56 and co-offered a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Why It Makes Sense to Exempt Veterinarians." She stated that both AKVMA and the Alaska Board of Veterinary Examiners (BOVE) "strongly" support HB 56, which would exempt veterinarians from the requirements of PDMP. She continued that the Alaska Board of Pharmacy also supports the proposed legislation. On slide 4, she gave the background on PDMP in Alaska.

[3:23:38 PM](#)

DR. WARD moved to slide 5 and stated that PDMP is ineffective for veterinarians because it was established for use with human medication, not animal medication. She continued that the current system is not useful for the data because the PDMP query is made on the individual who brings the animal to the veterinarian, and it is the human's data that is obtained. She explained that this is not useful because veterinarians are not trained in human pharmacology. She continued to slide 6 and reviewed the human privacy issue, as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) does not cover veterinarians; therefore, veterinarians are not required to keep the information obtained private. She pointed out a list of medications this may concern. She moved to slide 7, which addressed accountability for veterinarians with controlled substances, and she referenced that both the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and the distributors of controlled substances monitor patterns of drug prescriptions by veterinarians.

[3:27:31 PM](#)

RACHEL BERNGARTT, DVM, Chair, Board of Veterinary Examiners, provided invited testimony on HB 56 and co-offered a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Why It Makes Sense to Exempt Veterinarians." On slide 8, she pointed out that 33 other states have removed the requirement that veterinarians report on PDMP, and she advised that there is wide spread acceptance for this exemption. She stated that PDMP is a "good tool" for "doctor shopping;" however, there has been no reported increase in this behavior concerning veterinarians. She moved to slide 9 and pointed out the difference between the drugs veterinarians prescribe and the drugs related to overdose deaths. She moved to slide 10, pointing out the licensing burden that PDMP causes BOVE and the licensees.

[3:32:06 PM](#)

DR. BERNGARTT, moving to slide 11, stated that Alaska has the highest licensing fees for veterinarians in the country. She advised that nationwide there is a veterinarian shortage. She suggested that these high fees will deter veterinarians from moving to Alaska. Concluding on slide 12, she pointed out that AKVMA and Bove support HB 56 because it will allow veterinarians to provide appropriate care for each patient; increase the efficiency of PDMP for its intended purpose; allow continued judicious use of controlled substances; and eliminate unnecessary and disproportionate business burdens for veterinarians.

[3:34:06 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER questioned what medications veterinarians prescribe if opioids and these types of drugs are not prescribed by veterinarians.

DR. BERNGARTT responded that one of the primary opioid medications prescribed is a small amount of hydrocodone in a flavored-type dog treat for small dogs with a cough. She added that these treats are expensive. In response to a follow-up question, she confirmed that some drugs veterinarians prescribe can be used by humans; however, she argued that these drugs, such as antibiotics, are not controlled substances related to PDMP.

[3:37:55 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:37 p.m. to 3:38 p.m.

[During the at-ease, Vice Chair Ruffridge passed the gavel to Representative Wright.]

[3:38:37 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE, as prime sponsor, offered closing comments on HB 56. He stated that the proposed legislation has been before the legislature for a number of years, and he suggested that it be passed. He offered that PDMP is an important program; however, veterinarians should be able to continue to do their work while keeping patient information private.

[3:39:38 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:39 p.m. to 3:40 p.m.

[Representative Wright passed the gavel back to Vice Chair Ruffridge.]

[3:40:06 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that HB 56 was held over.

HB 99-DISCRIMINATION: GENDER ID.;SEXUAL ORIENT.

[3:40:12 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 99, "An Act relating to and prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity or expression."

[3:40:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JENNIE ARMSTRONG, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, introduced HB 99. She notified the committee that the Alaska State Commission for Human Rights has jurisdiction in some subject areas in public schools, and certain parts of the committee packet were created by this commission's staff and not the Department of Law staff.

[3:42:37 PM](#)

JOSH SMITH, representing self, provided invited testimony in support of HB 99. He shared that he served for 10 years in the United States Air Force and expressed pride in this; however, he stated that the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy for the armed forces was "difficult" for him, as he had to keep his identity as a gay man hidden for fear of being discharged. He shared that this had resulted in him being unable to express his "authentic self," and any conversations he had were "inauthentic," as he had to avoid the truth in order to maintain his position. He said that he eventually began to consider self-harm and eventually attempted suicide.

MR. SMITH stated that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was rescinded during his time in the Air Force; however, the culture of the military "took time to catch up;" therefore, he continued to hide his sexuality. He stated that some of his colleagues continued to speak poorly of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) community, and after

he began to share his sexuality, some accepted him while he continued to face discrimination from military leadership and older civilian employees. He expressed the understanding that homophobia was "the price to be paid" for the acceptance of his peers. He shared that there were others who also faced the same discrimination.

MR. SMITH stated that he remained careful of sharing his sexuality with others when he was away from his installation. He said that the federal workplace regulations protecting against discrimination did not exist off base. He expressed concern for his safety and the potential effects in other parts of his life. He gave the example of purchasing a home and not mentioning his significant other. He said that increasing protections for the LGBTQ community in Alaska have given him a chance to feel comfortable being his true self and healing from the years of shame and oppression. He said that affirming legislation and public sentiment have given him a chance to live authentically with his husband of 5 years. He concluded by expressing the belief that discrimination has "no place in Alaska," and without legal protections discrimination is still possible.

[3:47:35 PM](#)

LYNN DAVIS, representing self, provided invited testimony in support of HB 99. She shared that she worked for 15 years for the Department of Labor and Workforce Development at the Juneau Job Center. While working at the job center, she stated that she witnessed many instances of discrimination against members of the LGBTQ+ community in terms of hiring, firing, job retention, and receiving job interviews. She described the losing of one's job because of discrimination as a "wound to the soul." She stated that more than 30 members of the LGBTQ+ community testified about losing their jobs because of discrimination when the City of Juneau considered protections for members of the LGBTQ+ community. She expressed the opinion that talented workers pay attention to the states with protections for LGBTQ+ people. She continued that having these protections would strengthen the workforce of Alaska.

[3:50:45 PM](#)

MAUREEN LONGWORTH, MD, representing self, provided invited testimony in support of HB 99. She shared that she is a retired physician who has treated patients who have shown signs of distress because of discrimination. She said that some of her

patients expressed suicidal thoughts at the idea of being discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. She said that various health organizations are supportive of legislation which would create "safe and equal" home, work, and public environments for members of the LGBTQ community. She said that medical studies show that equality provisions result in healthier communities. She pointed out that because of the remoteness of many communities in Alaska, it can be difficult for members of the LGBTQ community to find support, and she suggested that laws protecting these individuals from discrimination would reduce the risk of isolation. She pointed out that Alaska has a disproportionate number of teen suicides and homelessness, and this number is increased among the LGBTQ community.

[3:53:58 PM](#)

HAYLEE MORRIS, Small Business Owner, provided invited testimony in support of HB 99. She shared that as a licensed professional counselor she has worked with Alaskans who need behavioral health services to address gender identity and sexual orientation issues in regard to employment. She noted a particular client who experienced a hostile work environment, which led to suicidal thoughts. She said that this client left the job and has no insurance or a paycheck. She stated that instead of paying in to public resources via taxes, the individual needs public assistance. She said that her client is currently on Medicaid.

MS. MORRIS referenced a second client in a similar situation, whose employer is affirming and supportive in preventing discrimination despite having no legal obligation to do so. She said that this client's taxes go towards paying for public assistance programs rather than collecting public assistance. She advised that workplace morale has a great impact on the mental health of her clients. She continued that she has witnessed discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals when it comes to housing and knows of people at risk of losing jobs because of discrimination. She expressed the opinion that HB 99 would help improve the mental health of Alaskans and reduce tax burdens.

[3:59:06 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR RUFFRIDGE opened public testimony on HB 99. He stated the House Labor and Commerce committee had received testimony from 1,000 people.

4:00:09 PM

MORGAN LIM, Lobbyist, Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates for Alaska, testified in support of HB 99. He stated that the proposed legislation would update Alaska's nondiscrimination statutes regarding dignity and fairness for the LGBTQ community. He expressed the opinion that everyone deserves to be his/her/their authentic self, without discrimination. He asserted Alaskans across the state live in fear of losing housing, public services, and financial opportunities because of gender, identity expression, and sexual orientation. He advanced Planned Parenthood as a good organization for public health and business. He explained many LGBTQ individuals hide their identities at work for fear of earning lower wages and fewer employment opportunities, adding that discrimination can lead to several physiological maladies. He maintained HB 99 is good for the LGBTQ community and good for Alaska.

4:02:37 PM

KASEY CASORT, representing self, praised HB 99, and expressed enthusiastic support. She provided her personal background and the history of similar legislation from 2015. She highlighted portions of the proposed bill that refer to the types of discrimination LGBTQ communities face. She expressed the realization of how vulnerable her friends are to these forms of discrimination. She urged testifiers to share terrifying stories to show how discrimination has affected people. In contrast, she provided a story of attending her first drag show at the age of 18, and how "queer joy" has changed her life in a positive way. This had allowed her to imagine a future. She spoke about "coming out" to her sister. She expressed the idea that queer joy is abundant, with room for everyone to experience it. She thanked the committee.

4:04:40 PM

ROSE O'HARA-JOLLEY, representing self, indicated that [they preferred the pronoun "they"] and lived in the Interior for 10 years before moving to Anchorage. They identified themselves as an "out, queer person" who has experienced discrimination, and they also spoke about sharing queer joy. They said, "Regardless of what the legislature does, we will always exist and will always carve out spaces for ourselves." They remarked that turning 40 this year was a "milestone" for a queer person. They said they were "fully out" in the workplace, with co-workers who

respect the appropriate pronouns. They stated that they have safe housing, with an active social life with people who know and love them. They said, "I do not have to hide who I am, and that is amazing." They said housing, employment, and access to necessities should be a right, not a privilege, extended equally to everyone in the state, as many people feel they cannot "come out" publicly for fear of being fired or evicted. They urged the committee to pass HB 99 so all people in Alaska can have happy and full lives, free from fear.

[4:07:16 PM](#)

TARA LYNCH-HUSSLY (ph), representing self, stated, "As a queer indigenous youth, I have faced a lot of discrimination." She stated that every day she is pushed to put a label on her sexuality and conform to society's labels. She emphasized the importance of not labeling people. She shared that she is fortunate to have a safe home where she can live openly. She stated that she never had to "come out" to her family because they already knew when she was young. She said LGBT youth in Alaska are discriminated against, and suicide rates and depression are very high in this demographic. She expressed fear that friends "do bad stuff to themselves" because they do not have an accepting community. She said HB 99 would be "amazing" for herself and the rest of the LGBT community.

[4:10:04 PM](#)

MARIAH BENNETT, representing self, said that it is essential the transgender people have the same rights and protection as all citizens. She said that transgender individuals have faced discrimination and marginalization throughout history, and it is crucial to remember that transgender are people just like everyone else and should be treated with dignity. She urged inclusivity among all people. She reminded the committee that the Constitution of the United States provides protections for all and expressed hope that the proposed bill would pass.

[4:11:57 PM](#)

MICHAEL CONTI, representing self, said he has a transgender son, and he supports HB 99. He stated that the LGBTQ community has been discriminated against historically, with violent acts imposed on them. He urged that this community needs the same rights and protections as everyone. He opined that HB 99 is important for the safety of all people. He related that his son struggled emotionally through middle and high school, and when

he "came out" as nonbinary, and eventually transgender, the family witnessed his mood elevate with the acceptance of self. He said he does not think LGBTQ people are trying to influence anyone else's identity, rather "it's just about being themselves."

[4:14:15 PM](#)

JAMIE GIBSON, representing self, testified in support of HB 99, and indicated that [they prefer the pronoun "they"]. They described that they are a nonbinary lesbian and queer success story. They talked about being out with friends and at work but not feeling safe being who they are with strangers. They said Alaska law has never been on their side, so they have never felt safe seeking help. They said that Alaska's discrimination laws do not protect the LGBTQ community, which means "folks like me can be denied housing and public services just because of our gender identity, sexual orientation, or gender expression." They spoke about being proud and healing publicly in order to help those suffering in silence. They voiced that all LGBTQ people deserve the same rights as straight, cisgender people, and they urged the committee to pass HB 99.

[4:16:20 PM](#)

TERRY SULLIVAN, representing self, testified in support of HB 99. She shared that she had no idea about how "primitive" Alaska's discrimination law was until she had a transgender grandchild. She expressed her appreciation for the proposed legislation and her hope that everyone would have the right "to be proud and happy and safe."

[4:17:32 PM](#)

MICHAEL GARVEY, Lobbyist, American Civil Liberties Union of Alaska, testified in support of HB 99. He pointed out that there are sound arguments why HB 99 should be passed, as constitutional rights and civil liberties of LGBTQ Alaskans should be guaranteed; however, he maintained that in the moment the argument to pass the bill is a moral one. He explained that recent news "has underscored the constant and increased hostility that LGBTQ people face." He listed the following examples: the Human Rights Commission's refusal to investigate nonemployment complaints; the State Board of Education acting in secret to pass an antitransgender sports resolution; and a bill from Governor Mike Dunleavy that "would violate the privacy and safety of queer youth." He spoke about the joy that LGBTQ people bring to their families and communities, and he argued it

is morally imperative that the government help them "live free, full lives." He said HB 99 would help LGBTQ Alaskans address the harm they face daily and be in a better position to secure a safe home and economic security. He advised that it is time the state guarantee its prioritization of freedom and opportunity to everyone, and he urged the committee to pass HB 99.

[4:19:33 PM](#)

KEARSTYN "JAMES" COTTON, representing self, testified as a transgender man in support of HB 99. He expressed his anxiety about seeking public support or employment because of discrimination in response to his identity. He expressed support for the solidarity of the LGBTQ community in standing for its rights.

[4:20:33 PM](#)

BROOKS BANKER, representing self, testified in support of HB 99. He spoke about the violence inflicted on LGBTQ people in Alaska. He mentioned the Civil Rights Act and the Alaska Human Rights Act as doctrines intended to protect people historically targeted by injustices. He spoke of discrimination as perpetuating violence on a vulnerable population - especially transgender youth and people of color. He suggested that HB 99 would help end the violence and harassment experienced by the LGBTQ community.

[4:23:22 PM](#)

MENEKA THIRU, representing self, testified in support of HB 99. She emphasized she has many friends who are part of the LGBTQ community and expressed concern about the discrimination they may face seeking work. She encouraged the committee to support HB 99.

[4:25:07 PM](#)

ALEX B. JOHNSON, representing self, testified in support of HB 99, as it would offer protection against discrimination for him and other gay or transgender Alaskans. He said extending the definition of "sex" in Alaska law to include sexual orientation and gender identity is essential to protect marginalized groups in Alaska. He cited the U.S. Supreme Court case, Bostock v. Clayton County, 590 U.S. 644, (2020), in which the court stated that it is "impossible to discriminate against a person for

being homosexual or transgender without discriminating against the individual based on sex."

[4:27:03 PM](#)

PAIGE CHASE, representing self, testified in support of HB 99. She said the proposed legislation would protect her and others by expanding the definition of "sex discrimination" to include sexuality and gender identification. She said her health could suffer if HB 99 does not pass, as she is disabled and relies on a team of specialists for support. She stated that allowing health care workers to refuse her as a patient or to treat her differently because she is queer could prevent her from accessing necessary treatment, and this would severely diminish her quality of life. She said, "My physical health demands a lot of time and energy for me, so that last thing I need is to be worried that I'm not receiving the best possible care because of sexuality." She said HB 99 would protect her from discrimination by medical professionals.

[4:28:20 PM](#)

NORA GECAN, representing self, said she is a member of the queer community in Anchorage and expressed support for HB 99. She characterized the queer community in Alaska as "beautiful, strong, creative, and generous," as well as deserving of protection. She said while she has been fortunate to secure housing and a job, many LGBTQ+ people in Alaska are not as fortunate and are at high risk of losing housing and employment as a result of discrimination. She described the former experience of losing a job for reasons other than discrimination as hard; however, it would be harder on her mental and emotional health if the termination had been based on her sexuality. She suggested this would have made her consider leaving Alaska. She stated that antidiscrimination legislation "can protect many and hurt no one."

[4:30:34 PM](#)

JESSI SAIKI, representing self, testified in support of HB 99 and indicated that [they preferred the pronoun "they"]. They said they are nonbinary and autistic. They stated that above all, they are a human being, who wants to live "the best life possible, probably just like all of you." They said they dream of a life where they do not have to live in fear and secrecy. Growing up in Wasilla, they said they were "outed" by their peers in high school, and this brought on isolation, harassment,

and violence. They expressed joy in working with the LGBTQ community and heartbreak at witnessing the pain, isolation, and violence youth are experiencing. They emphasized, "All we want to do is be ourselves, to live the life our hearts and minds tell us to." They expressed the belief that HB 99 will save lives.

[4:32:50 PM](#)

CANYON KOKOCHURUK, representing self, said he was testifying as a queer Alaska Native man in support of HB 99. He related the various ways he has been assaulted [for being queer] and had gone through conversion therapy. He suggested that HB 99 would ensure something is done about these discriminatory acts. Furthermore, the proposed legislation would make it possible for someone who is queer to obtain housing. He talked about the bill providing the safety needed for queer people to be who they are.

[4:35:42 PM](#)

JOHNNY ELLIOTT, representing self, referenced the Bostock v. Clayton County case and the finding that discrimination based on sexual orientation is discrimination based on sex. He opined that the same could be said for gender identity and expression. He noted that the Department of Law said the logic [of the judge in the case] applied only to employment. He expressed the opinion that the application should be much broader. He expressed excitement that HB 99 "clarifies this issue on the right side" and "reaffirms a needed civil right for equal protection" for Alaska's LGBTQ community.

[4:37:48 PM](#)

SARAH FIEDLER, representing self, testified as a parent of a teen, who is part of the LGBTQ community. She talked about the transition to adulthood, expressing concern about her son's safety. She expressed the opinion that HB 99 would be a critical piece of a solution. She talked about the right to live without discrimination and her dream as a parent for her child to live his life as himself and how an individual who is allowed to do that can be a gift to the community.

[4:39:22 PM](#)

MIKE COONS, President, Concerned Conservatives of Alaska, testified in opposition to HB 99. He stated that HB 99 "is just

more 'woke' and LGBCDDXYZ garbage." He said he has "no problem" with the provision in Section 1 of the bill to add "sex" [to AS 18.80.300(1)]; however, regarding Section 2 of the bill, he pointed to science and maintained that for tens of thousands of years there have been the male and female sex only. He said, "Laws, like science, are supposed to be based on fact." He asked the committee to vote down HB 99.

[4:42:20 PM](#)

ALEX BURY, representing self, shared that she had left Alaska to feel safer, but returned as she "missed it." She pointed out that if she were to lose her job because of being gay, this could put "a drain on straight resources," and she spoke about the financial and emotional impacts of discrimination. She expressed fear that if HB 99 does not pass, this would be a signal to some "cruel people" that "it's okay to hurt or kill people they don't like." She said passing HB 99 would send the message that all Alaskans deserve the same basic rights and protections. She asked the committee to pass HB 99.

[4:44:05 PM](#)

JESSICA ROZATO, representing self, said she is gay, and her partner is transgender, and she is testifying on behalf of herself and her partner in support of HB 99. She noted there are supporters of the LGBTQ community throughout Alaska. She said, "I ask you all to positively and properly show our state's strength in regard for all human life by prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity and implement this necessary bill."

[4:45:48 PM](#)

JOSHUA KNICELY, representing self, testified in support of HB 99, stating that it would ban discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. He said this is important, because "discrimination stunts the economy." He said the amount of discrimination in Alaska makes him consider leaving. He asked the committee to pass HB 99.

[4:47:02 PM](#)

ROBERT HOCKEMA, representing self, expressed the opinion that the proposed legislation is long overdue. He said he grew up in a conservative part of the state and understands the fear some may have that the proposed legislation "codifies sexual life for

a certain population." He said he knows that the LGBTQ community "is one of many that the members of this entire chamber aren't particularly sympathetic to." He stated that in an ideal world there would be no need for government mandates, but because of the "bad apples out there," the government must take an active role in "leveling the playing field." He spoke of protecting minorities who face discrimination. He continued that denying access to people based on something they cannot change about themselves is not upholding "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." To those who may consider this governmental overreach, he posited that "for Alaska to stand for freedom from government, we have to stand against discrimination." He asked for overall support of the bill, including its "inevitable veto" by the governor.

[4:49:41 PM](#)

ZIA HETRICK, representing self, testified as a queer, transgender Alaskan in support of HB 99 and indicated that [they preferred the pronoun "they"]. They said discrimination has a huge impact on queer people in Alaska, sharing that they have experienced discrimination in the workplace and in life. They said that they feel safe in a bubble of queer friends and allies but is not protected outside of this bubble. They said antidiscrimination legislation "protects so many and hurts no one."

[4:50:45 PM](#)

TIMOTHY ANDERSON, representing self, expressed the belief that HB 99 is especially needed because of anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination and legislation in Alaska and other parts of the country.

[4:52:39 PM](#)

LISA MALONEY, representing self, argued that HB 99 should be passed because "LGBTQ rights are human rights." She said that members of the LGBTQ community are discriminated against and harassed and need the protection provided by the bill. She said that feeling safe at home and at work should be a starting place for people and not something that has to be worked for. She said that it is difficult for individuals to be productive members of society when they are concerned for their wellbeing.

[4:54:42 PM](#)

KATE VEH, representing self, testified in support of HB 99. She said that "we" are entering a new era in which "all colors of the rainbow" can have families. She expressed the belief that her late uncle was likely gay and would have been accepted in current times. She said that she is proud of LGBTQ people for overcoming the challenges with which they have been faced. She encouraged young people to vote for politicians who are supportive of LGBTQ rights.

[4:56:36 PM](#)

SUSAN BREZNICK, representing self, testified in support of HB 99. She stated that she supports HB 99 because her son is a member of the LGBTQ community. She said that it makes her sad to hear stories of LGBTQ people facing discrimination, and everyone deserves to have access to healthcare and a place to live.

[4:58:38 PM](#)

TITESUS EPSILON, representing self, testified in support of HB 99. He said, "There's a lot of people like me, and I didn't know I was a person like me for a long time." He indicated he's worked at the university and in Anchorage, and he said things are challenging there. He expressed love for Alaska and said he feels welcome "here" to contribute "the most that I have." He described HB 99 as a step in the right direction for leadership to indicate that "people like me" are included and are part of the team that makes [Alaska] a better place. He encouraged those legislators who may not want to vote for HB 99 to "just get it out of the way" and "move forward."

[5:00:47 PM](#)

ERINN BARNETT, representing self, testified in support of HB 99. She said she is a queer lesbian who is lucky to be part of the queer community and have safe, secure housing, as well as being "out" at work. Nevertheless, she said there is never a time where she does not need to consider "what is safe for me to disclose," on resumes or in public. She indicated these issues are magnified for those who are transgender and gender nonconforming, as they have lost jobs and have struggled to find safe and consistent housing as a result of the biases of others. She urged the committee to pass HB 99, which she described as "a huge step forward."

[5:03:23 PM](#)

ED MARTIN, representing self, testified on HB 99 and requested the deletion of part of Section 2. He said he does not have a problem with Section 1 of HB 99 but urged the committee to amend Section 2 to delete [paragraph] (20), which relates that the definition of "sex" include sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. He opined that this language does not define sex "as we have all known as a social norm for many, many years, all my life," and he expressed opposition that it belongs in this law. He said he would support HB 99 without this language. He added that he is a man, his wife is a woman, and his children were all born a certain sex.

[5:05:57 PM](#)

MICHAEL FLINT, representing self, Pride at Work, Alaska Chapter, described himself as a nonbinary disabled veteran living with PTSD. He stated that he was in the military under the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. He said he had to continue hiding who he was and faced discrimination when he moved to Alaska. He stated he has taken unapologetic pride in himself and the state; however, he has found it hard justifying living in Alaska with his spouse, as the state does not have equal protections. He described an interaction with a banker who encouraged not putting his husband on a loan for their house, and he suggested that this was "insulting." He stated the reason for creating Pride at Work was to create a community for queer employees and individuals in the workforce. He expressed discomfort when being himself at work. He emphasized that the right of queer people to exist should not be up for debate and referenced legislation from Alaska and other states. He suggested that over 70 percent of Americans support LGBTQ+ rights, and Alaska should not discourage queer individuals or allies from moving into the state, as the state is losing population.

[5:08:16 PM](#)

DARCY COUGHLEN, representing self, described the "brightest" part of her life had been when she "came out" as queer and transgender. She stated she moved to Alaska in 2017 and stayed because she had found community, friends, and family. She said she felt betrayed when her safety was questioned, and this had made her grieve for the pseudo safety she had felt within her community. She emphasized that antidiscrimination laws hurt nobody while helping everyone. She stated she works in a well-known brewery in Anchorage and has been frequently confronted with individuals who have political beliefs directly in

opposition to her existence, but she makes sure to treat them with care and warmth.

5:10:53 PM

CARLY JENSEN, representing self, said she grew up reciting the Pledge of Allegiance every morning and took to heart "liberty and justice for all." She expressed the opinion that the creeds of the country would not be upheld if there were not protections in place for the marginalized, and she argued that the state needs to ensure the rights of every American. She emphasized that she has a master's degree in biology, and she described science as being in support of different [physiological] expressions rather than chromosomal technology. She stated that biology and science support five main factors of expression: chromosomal, hormonal, hormonal expression, internal genitalia, and external genitalia. She said that statistically there are 120 different potential combinations of these. She expressed the opinion that to say there is only a binary is very narrowminded. She continued by pointing out that this argument is done without cutting down, degrading, or being overly condescending to the opposing side.

5:12:51 PM

AMBER O'BRIEN, representing self, stated that her daughter identifies as queer and goes to school in Wasilla. She expressed the opinion that children in Alaska should not live with an uncertain future in regard to "coming out" at school, as now parents are not able to reassure them of their safety and security with housing or a job. She emphasized that equality does not hurt anybody, as it is not a limited resource, and it could be given freely, while discrimination hurts everybody, not just queer people.

5:14:21 PM

MERCEDES ARCINIEGA, representing self, said the bill is a crucial part of implementing fair housing for all. She added that Section 2 of HB 99 would make a clear delineation of what constitutes as discrimination by sex or gender. She emphasized there are many "ignorant" things being said during the meeting and encouraged individuals to do more modern research to understand the differentiation of gender, gender expression, and sex. She expressed the opinion that the antidiscrimination bills do not harm anyone. She stated she is queer, and she and her wife own a business. She stated that she would "feel

prouder" to be an Alaskan if there were better protections for housing and employment.

[5:16:36 PM](#)

JAINA WILLAHAN, representing self, stated she is bisexual and spoke about one of her close friends being discriminated against concerning housing, and her friend had ended up living in a car. She expressed support of HB 99 as a step forward for more equality, as LGBTQ+ rights are human rights.

[5:17:51 PM](#)

MELISSA WHITE, representing self, said she is a mother of a young child and is an established professional in education and healthcare. She stated that Alaska should be "proud" to have antidiscrimination laws, and she expressed the opinion that the laws are not only morally right but are the best for the economy and community. She emphasized that it should not be lost in the discussion that the laws effect human beings. She stated that multiple times the U.S. and Alaska have stood on the side of inclusivity and equality, and currently the ideas around discrimination are outdated, threatening the safety of the entire community. She added that bills like HB 99 would not only affect the rights of queer individuals but also the rights of women, children, veterans, and disabled individuals.

[5:19:46 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR RUFFRIDGE, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 99.

[5:19:56 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that HB 99 was held over.

[5:20:05 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting was [adjourned] at 5:20 p.m.