

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

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GOVERNOR



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240 JOHN BOHLINGER
LT. GOVERNOR

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am not able to be with you today. I am in Billings with General Mosley where nearly 200 of our Montana National Guard troops are being called to active duty. I am speaking to them to offer our prayers for their safety and the good wishes from our administration; therefore I have asked Will Hammerquist, my chief of staff to read you my letter.

For the record, my name is John Bohlinger; I am the Lieutenant Governor of the State of Montana. I am here today to speak, as a proponent for House Bill 240, a Bill that will expand Montana's hate crime law to include physical or mental disability, gender and sexual orientation.

My support for this Bill and what it will attempt to accomplish comes from my belief in our fundamental human rights. As human beings, it is my belief that we as individuals, regardless of our physical or mental capacity, our gender or sexual orientation are entitled to protection from malicious intimidation or harassment.

People do not choose to be physically or mentally impaired, they do not choose their gender or their sexual orientation. We are what we are, as God created us and as a child of God are entitled to protection from harm.

Our laws are a written expression of our values. There was a time in our history that we allowed for mistreatment of people based on their religious beliefs, their race, their sex and in fact such discrimination was not only permitted but was codified in Montana Laws. My grandmother told me that in the late 1800's, when she was a little girl, and an emigrant from France, my family was attacked by the Klu Klux Klan, because we are Catholics and were not welcome in that community. Our State Government no longer allows for religious discrimination. We have come a long way and must continue to root out hate and teach tolerance.

Hate crimes create fear in an entire group of people. In Billings in 1993, a Jewish family had their home assaulted because they were Jewish. The entire Jewish community felt assaulted and was fearful for their safety. My town responded by saying the entire community was assaulted and the Billings Gazette printed a full page colored menorah that we all placed in our windows. We stood in solidarity with our Jewish community.

Three years ago a young man from my town, who was employed as a janitor at a shopping center was severely beaten because he was mentally

disabled. These sort of crimes should have been punished under 45-4-222 that allows for sentence enhancement, with a punishment of imprisonment of not less than 2 years or more than 10 years.

It is my hope that your Committee will move this Bill forward.

Thanks for your attention.