

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

SENATE JUDICIARY
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Bill No. SB 371

BRIAN SCHWEITZER
GOVERNOR



JOHN BOHLINGER
LT. GOVERNOR

Senate Bill 371, Human Rights Legislation

Testimony February 2, 2007

For the record, my name is John Bohlinger; and I am the Lieutenant Governor of the State of Montana. I come before you today to speak of our Administration's support for Senate Bill 371, a bill to expand the protected classes held within Montana's human rights law to include gender identity and sexual orientation.

Our support for this bill is based on the belief that freedom from discrimination is a fundamental human right. 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, their race, or their sexual orientation. We are what we are, as God created us and as a child of God are entitled to protection from discrimination.

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 the laws of our state.

Last session I shared a story from my childhood—a potent memory that provided the foundation for my belief that hatred, intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination has no place in America. To this day, it is difficult for me to tell you this because I can still see in my mind's eye my terrified grandmother, who told me this story. When I was 14, my father died and my Mother was unable to care for my sister and me. My Grandmother, who was 90 years old, invited us to live with her in her home in Little Rock, AK. She told me that in the late 1800's, her family emigrated from France to the United States seeking a better life. Once settled here, her family's home was attacked by the Klu Klux Klan because of their religious orientation, they were Catholic. They were told they were not welcome in the community.

Today federal and state human rights no longer allows for religious discrimination. We have made great strides to create a more just and fair society and we must continue to do so. ~~Must continue to do so~~ Senate Bill 371 is a continuation of our efforts to become a more just society, in which all Montanans can live a life free from of discrimination and prejudice.

Montana has a responsibility to fulfill its promise of liberty and justice for all of its citizens by ensuring that all Montanan's are treated fairly in the areas of housing, employment, public accommodations and finance.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I thank you for your time and consideration. Governor Schweitzer and I advocate for you to move this just and fair piece of legislation to the body as whole for further deliberations.

Thank you.