

My name is Josh Crismore. I am from Libby Montana and I am currently attending the University of Montana in Missoula. I urge you to oppose HB 516.

I grew up coming to Helena, watching my grandfather as he served in the senate and listening to the conservative ideals of small government, allowing people to live their lives and the strongly held belief that the best decisions are those made on the local level closest to the people it effects. This bill supports none of those things. It is a statement that decisions made in Helena are better than those made in local communities, it takes away the right of cities to protect their communities and it says that I, as a gay man, do not deserve the same rights and privileges afforded to my straight friends and neighbors.

Our founding documents promise all people the inalienable rights of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. I did not forfeit those rights on the day I came out yet my community has to fight for them every day. How can one support their life when they are denied the opportunity of employment or housing, not for anything they have done or not done, but simply because of who they are. How do we have Liberty when we are forced to decide between having work and housing or being true to ourselves? How can we pursue happiness when we are expected to hide and lie about our identity or face repercussions?

We have fought for years to address these inequities on both the Federal and State level with no success so the City of Missoula, seeing our struggles, exercised not only its right but its responsibility to identify issues affecting their community and to address them. Missoula stood up and said that we would at least be protected and treated with equality within that city.

I strongly urge you to stand up for the rights of local governments and Montana residents and oppose HB 516.

Thank You