

Re: HB516

Dear Members of the Senate Local Government Committee:

My name is Kim Leighton. I live in Missoula, Montana and am an active member of the LGBT community. Upon hearing of this bill, I instantly became disheartened, frustrated and ultimately shocked. The passage of this ordinance in Missoula brought hope and comfort in a world where the LGBT community is so often targeted for discrimination, violence and hatred.

I came out approximately 4 years ago. Since that time I have been fortunate to have worked with organizations where not only is it "ok" to be gay, but it has been celebrated. Many of my friends do not have that luxury. The idea that someone could legally be fired or denied housing, simply for being gay or transgender seems archaic to me. These sorts of protections are necessary. Discrimination and hate crimes happen all the time.

I, for one, do not fit in the stereo-typical gender box of what a woman should look like. Because of this I often get looks when walking into a public restroom or have even been called "sir" or referred to as a man in the line at the grocery store. This is frustrating, but ultimately I can usually brush it off. However, there was one instance in which I truly felt threatened and scared for my physical safety. I was standing by myself on the corner of Higgins and Broadway one night in Missoula. As I waited for the light to change so I could cross, a very large truck full of men drove by me and yelled, "fucking faggot". It was the first time I truly felt fear simply for being gay. I didn't know if they were going to stop and physically attack me or not. I couldn't even look up to see what kind of truck it was. I was paralyzed with fear. I had to get a ride home that evening, even though I live only 5 or 6 blocks away. I suddenly didn't feel safe anymore. It was an awful feeling that I don't ever want to experience again. Nobody should have to.

These incidences happen all the time. The protections put forth by the ordinance in Missoula are one way we can feel a little bit safer in our community where we simply want to live our lives in peace. Please don't take that away from us. I implore you to please vote against this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Kim Leighton
Missoula, MT