



HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
CAMPAIGN®

SENATE JUDICIARY

Exhibit No. 4

Date 1/30/15

Bill No. SB 179

January 20, 2015

Senate Judiciary Committee  
Montana State Capitol  
1301 East 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Helena, Montana

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Sarah Warbelow, and I am the Legal Director for the Human Rights Campaign, America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. On behalf of our more than 1,500,000 members and supporters nationwide, including thousands in Montana, I am writing you today in support of Senate Bill No. 179, which would add sexual orientation and gender identity as classes protected under the Montana Human Rights Act.

America has a proud history of valuing liberty, freedom, and hard work. Anti-discrimination laws put those values into practice. By expanding the Montana Human Rights Act to include LGBT people, Montana will send a strong message that all of its residents matter. It is time to ensure discrimination doesn't trump merit or basic fairness by extending protections to cover sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

Discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people continues to be a very real problem. Far too often, LGBT Americans have lost their livelihoods simply because of some combination of an employer's fear, ignorance and intolerance. Some are highly skilled professionals who, though seemingly irreplaceable in their positions, suddenly become expendable when they wish to live openly in their communities or are outed by colleagues. Others are people forced into whatever jobs they can find, some scraping together money for the tremendous medical costs of gender transition, which are rarely covered by health insurance. They are people in every walk of life – doctors and lawyers, plumbers and bus drivers. Many are parents and spouses, whose efforts to find secure, fulfilling employment are also a struggle to provide for their families. The time has long since passed when we as a nation ought to tolerate arbitrary discrimination against any group of people. I cannot understate the real-life implications for Montana. That any hardworking LGBT Montanan should be denied the ability to contribute to the economy and support his or her family is simply unacceptable. It is well-documented that LGBT people are shown less desirable properties for purchase or rent, receive less favorable customer service, or encounter outright refusal of service. This bill does not prevent employers from firing incompetent employees and does not prevent landlords from turning down unqualified renters. Instead, this law would simply make sure that all employees get a fair chance at

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working hard to get ahead without discrimination or bias and that no one is singled out for arbitrary discrimination when it comes to areas like employment, housing, public accommodations, credit, and education. Since marriage equality has arrived in Montana, these protections are more important than ever – under Montana law, a same-sex couple can get legally married on Sunday and fired for being gay on Monday.

Finally, passing this law will place Montana in good company. Beginning with an ordinance passed in Minneapolis in 1975, 18 states, the District of Columbia, and more than 225 cities and counties have enacted laws prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. More than 600 private businesses across the United States, including 66% of Fortune 500 companies have voluntarily adopted policies that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. So have the cities of Bozeman, Butte, Helena, and Missoula. The Billings Clinic and VA Montana Health Care system – two of the largest employers in the state – have such policies not only for their own employees but also for their patients. The University of Montana and Montana State University have inclusive non-discrimination policies. For that matter, so does Walmart, another major Montana employer, and Oracle, an industry leader with a Montana connection. Employers, hospitals, universities, and governments nationwide all have recognized that they are at their best – their most competitive and most productive – when they do the right thing and affirm that they're open to everyone.

It has never been more important for Montana to act and ensure that discrimination has no place in this great state. Please vote in favor of SB 179.

Sincerely,



Sarah Warbelow