

Kalamazoo Anti-Discrimination Ordinance Forum Presentation

March 9, 2009

Good evening, my name is Sara Van Wormer and I am speaking on behalf of the Michigan Project for Informed Public Policy. The project is comprised of Michigan psychologists, social scientists, college professors and other health care professionals that believe in providing valid psychological research and data to help inform public policy. Our project's volunteers have spent a significant amount of time researching many of the concerns that are raised in this ordinance.

As you listen to concerned Kalamazoo residents tonight, I would ask that you take into account the vast body of evidence showing how discrimination and bias can seriously affect the emotional well-being of everyday citizens. I will provide a sampling of that information tonight.

I would like to begin this presentation by explaining how the medical and mental health community recognizes gay and transgender people:

- Being gay is not considered a psychological illness anywhere in the medical community;
- The American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association and American Medical Association have all adopted policies that promote the fair and proper medical treatment for transgender people;
- This includes affirming a person's stated sexual orientation and gender identity;
- Allowing access to fair and equal health care;
- And rejecting any therapy that seeks to change a person's sexual orientation.

It is important to know the facts about the **negative effects of discrimination** and how ordinary citizens could be harmed:

- Seven separate studies found that transgender people often face discrimination and rejection by society including family, friends and coworkers.^{4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 17, 25, 26}
- Studies dating back to 1999, show that transgender people across the U.S. experience high rates of verbal harassment, physical violence, and employment and housing discrimination.^{8, 18, 20, 28, 30}
- The UCLA School of Law found that between 16 to 68 percent of gay people surveyed have experienced unfair employment practices based on their sexual orientation alone.³
- An average of 40% of transgender people have reported some kind of job discrimination.²⁴

Another source showed that:

- Up to 56% were reportedly fired;

- 47% were denied employment;
- A third were harassed;
- And one in five were denied a promotion based on their gender identity.³
- As a result, 15 different studies showed that 40% of transgender people were unemployed, with one study reporting 72%.³
- In three separate studies, an average of 25% said they were denied housing, were evicted or otherwise treated unfairly because they were transgender.³
- They experience disproportionate rates of homelessness and poverty.^{1, 2}

The mental health effects of discrimination of these residents are widespread and far-reaching:

- Research shows that discrimination has been connected to increased levels of tension, depression, anxiety, anger, sadness, hostility, decreased self-esteem, elevated blood pressure and other chronic health problems.²⁷
- It has also been linked to insomnia, nausea, headaches and self-reported ill health and disabilities.²⁷
- Not surprisingly, five separate studies showed that discriminatory environments lead to poor health outcomes for gay women and men.^{10, 18, 22, 23, 29}
- A transgender person often must face added social stigma and risk further damaging behavior by others. As a result:
 - Over 40% have experienced some form of physical abuse or violence.
 - 80% have suffered verbal abuse or harassment.
 - And studies show that almost half of all transgender people surveyed feel unsafe.³
 - Multiple studies have shown that up to two-thirds are already struggling with high rates of substance abuse, depression and suicidal thoughts or attempts.¹
 - One study showed that approximately 33% of all transgender youth have attempted suicide.⁹
 - For people who are already experiencing rejection by certain members of society, the impact can be, quite literally, life-threatening.

As this ordinance has taken shape, there have been questions about how a transgender person would access everyday services, including a public restroom. There are national training guides and resources to help address restroom and public accommodation use by a transgender person.

It is important to know that:

- A transgender person does not enter a restroom to attack women and children.
- In fact, there is no legal data that a transgender person has **EVER** been charged with, or tried for, abducting or sexually abusing a woman or child in a public restroom.¹⁴
- Studies dating back to the late 1970s show that over 95% of sexual abusers and predators are heterosexual men.^{15, 16}

- In fact, even adult males who perpetrate onto boys almost always identify as being heterosexual.¹⁵

The citizens of Kalamazoo need to be aware that there are already laws protecting them from inappropriate and illegal behavior in public places, including restrooms.

No one is allowed to commit a crime in a public restroom.

And this ordinance **WOULD NOT PROTECT ANYONE** who engaged in criminal behavior in a public place, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Engaging in criminal behavior is not the same as protecting someone from being discriminated against.¹⁴

It's important to note that transgender people are on the receiving end of aggression:

- With over 40% experience physical abuse or violence;
- 80% being verbally abused or harassed;
- And almost half of them feeling unsafe at any given time.²⁴

I would like to draw attention to facts concerning similar ordinances in the United States and the state of Michigan:

- Over 107 jurisdictions across the U.S. have passed laws that protect people from being fired unfairly based solely on their gender identity or expression.
 - Including half of all states, and nearly 20 Michigan cities such as Detroit, Grand Rapids, Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, Lansing, East Lansing, Saugatuck, Huntington Woods and Ferndale.
- Almost half of all states, and nearly 20 Michigan cities, protect someone from being fired based only on their sexual orientation.
- There has never been a single incident of criminal attack of women and children in the restrooms of the 13 states and almost 100 municipalities having similar ordinances.²⁴
- In our extensive research, we could find no proven cases of reverse discrimination in these jurisdictions.
- All law-abiding residents should be allowed to earn a living and not be harassed or hurt based on who they are.
- In fact, nearly 90% of Americans believe someone should not be fired based only on their sexual orientation.¹³
- This ordinance does not allow for special rights or privileges for any group of citizens.
- Nothing in this ordinance impacts the freedom of speech, freedom of religion or the exercise of these inalienable American rights.
- This ordinance will also help the victims of discrimination who are not gay, but may be wrongly perceived as so by others.

Finally . . .

- There is absolutely no research showing that someone can become gay or transgender as a result of having contact with a gay or transgender teacher, employer, coworker, employee, etc.
- Nor would any child become gay or transgender as a result of an ordinance prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Discrimination doesn't only affect those that are directly experiencing it nor do the feelings of hopelessness, mistrust, despair and alienation stop at the end of the workday.²¹ Stress and depression comes home and affects family, friends, loved ones and the community.²¹

It is our sincere hope that you take into account the enormous body of research documenting the devastating psychological and emotional health consequences of discrimination. In addition, we ask that you consider the very real harm that could come to everyday Kalamazoo residents who are not legally protected from unfair bias in employment, housing and public accommodations. Thank you.

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