

Testimony for HB 4192
House Judiciary Committee Meeting 8/26/09

MICHIGAN PROJECT FOR INFORMED PUBLIC POLICY (MPIPP)

Testimony Prepared for HB 4192

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Good morning, my name is Sara Van Wormer and I am speaking on behalf of the Michigan Project for Informed Public Policy. We are comprised of Michigan psychologists, social scientists, university professors and other health care professionals that believe in providing valid psychological research and data to help inform public policy.

We have researched many of the concerns that are raised in HB 4192. I would like to provide you with a sampling of the information we found that demonstrates how discrimination and bias can seriously affect the emotional well-being of everyday citizens.

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

- Research has shown that over 40% of gay and bisexual people report either day-to-day and/or lifetime experiences with discrimination. (Mays, 2001)
- Discrimination leads to physical reactions such as a headache, nausea and insomnia. (Mays, 2001)
- Discrimination can produce severe psychological reactions such as depression, anxiety, increased drug use and post-traumatic stress disorder. (Rawles, 2003) (Friedman, 2009)
- Multiple psychological studies have shown that victimization (verbal abuse, threats of attack and assaults) have harmful effects on mental health. (Mays, 2001) (Friedman, 2009) (Herek, 1999)

And it makes sense, because we intuitively know that the more a person gets harassed, the greater their risk for emotional difficulties.

A University of California research psychologist and noted expert in the study of discrimination and bias notes:

"Hate crimes based on sexual orientation appear to have more serious psychological effects on their victims than do other crimes." (Herek, 1999)

His research demonstrated:

- Nearly 30% of the gay men and women studied had experienced a bias-related crime such as assault, rape, robbery, theft and vandalism.

- They had significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, anger and post-traumatic stress symptoms than did victims of non-bias related crimes.

Including,

- A heightened sense of personal danger and vulnerability — these individuals felt more unsafe, viewing their communities as more dangerous, unpredictable, and hostile.
- Higher levels of depression, stress, and anger were identified for as long as 5 years after the victimization occurred.

Hate crimes based on sexual orientation occur against a backdrop of ongoing harassment.

In the previous year:

- More than half of those surveyed had been the target of verbal abuse.
- Nearly a fifth had been threatened with violence, chased or both.
- 16% had been the targets of employment discrimination — either in hiring, firing, promotion, or treatment in the workplace. (Herek, 1999) (American Psychiatric Association, 1997)

According to research conducted at the UCLA School of Law:

- Up to 70% of gays and lesbians have reported discrimination in the workplace. (Badgett, 2007)

But discrimination doesn't only affect those that are directly experiencing it nor do the feelings of hopelessness, mistrust, despair and alienation go away quickly. Stress and depression affects family, friends, loved ones and the community. (Massie, 2009)

It is our sincere hope that you consider the multiple research studies showing how discrimination and bias has serious, long-lasting psychological consequences on its victims.

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