

Remarks by Dr. Mitchel D. Livingston, NCCJ Board Chair

In support of amending the City's Human Rights Ordinance to cover discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation

March 14, 2006; 2:00 p.m. City Hall, Council Chambers, Law & Public Safety
Committee Hearing\City of Cincinnati

My name is Dr. Mitchel Livingston and I am here as Chair of the board of directors of the National Conference for Community and Justice of Greater Cincinnati. On its behalf, I urge you to amend the City's ordinance to restore protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

It is the fair thing to do. It is the competitive thing to do.

Just yesterday, NCCJ and two other organizations released results of a major Human Relations Indicator Survey. One of its key findings was that local Muslims, Jews, and gays & lesbians are experiencing significant social distance from the majority of area residents, to the degree that they are deemed especially vulnerable to prejudice and discrimination. Under the City's current HRO, Muslims and Jews are protected against discrimination. Gays, lesbians and transgender people, however, are NOT protected.

Fairness says, they should be!

The City has precedent for doing so in that gays and transgender people are presently covered under the City's Hate Crimes law. Amending the HRO, as proposed, simply covers these same citizens for protection in housing, employment and public accommodation.

Moreover, providing protections to our gay, lesbian and transgender citizens keeps the City in step with local employers and with other cities in our region. Our community's largest employers recognize that policies that protect all of their employees from possible discrimination are essential to their recruitment and retention of qualified employees and to their financial success.

At the moment, Cincinnati is at a disadvantage in our regional marketplace by being the only major city without HRO coverage for gays and transgender people. Ahead of us in providing protections for their gay citizens are ... Columbus, Cleveland, Toledo, Louisville, Lexington, and just recently, Indianapolis. And just across the river, Covington has joined them. Clearly, if we hope to compete for economic growth, we need to keep pace of these communities.

So, to be fair, to be competitive, let's approve of this proposed amendment. Let's honor the mandate of the repeal of Article XII and demonstrate that we are a community that values and protects all of its citizens, not just some of them.

For NCCJ, I thank you for your consideration.

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