



## **Press Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **All Montanans Must be Protected**

**ACLU of Montana Urges Representatives to Stand Up for LGBT Citizens.  
Approve HB 514 and Reject HB 516**

HELENA, MT — The American Civil Liberties Union of Montana joined with other Montana human rights groups today urged members of the Montana House Judiciary Committee to stand-up for the rights of all Montanans to work and live free from discrimination by voting for House Bill 514 and against House Bill 516.

House Bill 514, introduced by Rep. Edith McClafferty of Butte, would add gender identity or expression and sexual orientation to the list of protected classes under the state's Human Rights Act. It would make it unlawful for people to discriminate against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people when it comes to hiring, renting and public accommodations.

Montana has a lengthy and distressing history of discrimination against LGBT people. HB 514 would go a long way toward ensuring fairness.

On the other end of the spectrum, House Bill 516, introduced by Havre Rep. Kristin Hansen, would strip protections away from LGBT people living, working and recreating in Missoula by making it unlawful for cities to expand their own human rights protections to include any group of people not listed in Montana's Human Rights.

Elected officials in Missoula represent their community and its citizens, and in the spring of 2010 voted to include gender identity and sexual orientation in the city's non-discrimination ordinance. Other Montana cities are considering doing the same.

"It is simply shameful for state lawmakers to consider legislation to remove these protections and prevent other communities from taking action to make sure all their citizens are treated with dignity and respect in terms of employment, housing and public accommodations," said Niki Zupanic, ACLU of Montana Public Policy Director.

At best, it's hypocritical for state lawmakers to invalidate a local regulation even as many of those same lawmakers are criticizing federal lawmakers for imposing their views upon Montana. At worst it's a mean-spirited attempt to keep some Montanans trapped as second-class citizens.

The ACLU is also deeply disappointed that time for public testimony on both of these bills will be severely limited, and is co-sponsoring with the Montanan Human Rights Network, Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, NARAL Pro-Choice Montana, Planned Parenthood of Montana, and Montana Equality Now, an alternative opportunity for witnesses against discrimination to be heard at the Jeannette Rankin statue on the Second floor. There will be a lectern and microphone, and witnesses will be able to continue their testimony there.

"Many people traveled for hours to come to the hearing. Everyone who wants to speak up for the rights of all Montanans should, and will, have the opportunity to be heard," Zupanic said.