

# **CITY OF TACOMA PASSES SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY ANTI-DISCRIMINATION ORDINANCE**

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Following years of information gathering, numerous public forums and an official public hearing, the Tacoma City Council adopted an ordinance to protect the rights of sexual minorities on April 23, 2002. Specifically, the Council added sexual orientation and gender identity to the City's list of protected classes within its antidiscrimination ordinance.

Charged with the task of studying, investigating, mediating and holding public meetings on community-wide problems arising in the City of Tacoma, the Tacoma Human Rights commission spent over two years reviewing the need to provide protected class status to sexual minorities under the City Code. Initial information gleaned through informal polls at the series of public events in 2000 and 2001 spurred the Commission to add formal public data to its findings.

Six public forums and additional Neighborhood Council presentations were conducted in March and April to receive citizen input on a proposal to amend the City's existing law against discrimination. The proposed amendment called for including sexual orientation and gender identity as new protected classes in the areas of employment, housing and public accommodations. Feedback from the public ran nearly five to one in favor of the new protections.

After the public hearings, the findings and a proposed ordinance to amend the City Code were presented to the City Council. The Council adopted the ordinance with only minor revisions. The Council added changes to clarify an employer's rights to enforce dress codes and to exempt both the rental and sale of non-profit religious dwellings and the rental of owner-occupied single family dwellings.

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