Governor Receives Task Force on Equality Report

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Today Governor Ted Kulongoski received the final report and recommendations of his Taskforce on Equality in Oregon . The report summarizes the work of the Task Force this year and recommends two major changes to State policy: State law should prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and should provide a framework for legal recognition of same-sex relationships in a form that is different than marriage. â€œEqual protection under the law is the cornerstone of a just and democratic society,â€• said Governor Kulongoski. â€œMy commitment to ending discrimination based on sexual orientation dates back more than 30 years to when I first introduced such legislation in 1975. I believe that next year we can make that a reality.â€• The Governor formed the Taskforce in February 2006, and charged it with analyzing current state law to determine whether changes are needed to guarantee that all Oregonians receive adequate protections from discrimination regardless of their sexual orientation. The Task Force, assisted by the Department of Justice, the Bureau of Labor and Industries and individuals involved in past legislative efforts, reviewed Oregon statutes, anti-discrimination laws enacted in 10 Oregon cities, two Oregon counties and 17 other states, as well as caselaw and statistics. The Task Force held public meetings around the State to hear public testimony. Many of the business and community leaders who testified before the Task Force are located in cities or counties that have already adopted anti-discrimination laws and reported that the law has actually been good for business. The report highlights examples from these communities and concludes that Oregon would not suffer any economic repercussions as a result of these policy changes. â€œThis is about basic questions of fairness and equity under the law,â€• said the Governor. â€œWe must continue to strive to make Oregon a state of economic and social opportunity for all of our citizens, regardless of race, gender, religion, age or sexual orientation.â€• The first Task Force recommendation is that the Governor should introduce legislation that will prohibit sexual orientation discrimination similar to current law that prohibits discrimination based on race, color, sex, martial status, age, national origin or religion. The Taskforce also recommends that the Governor introduce legislation that creates a civil union framework similar to the civil union law adopted in Vermont. The Task Force report indicates that this recommendation is a logical extension of anti-discrimination law, and the Stateâ€™s failure to recognize same-sex relationships constitutes discrimination in that it denies same-sex couples rights, benefits and responsibilities that are currently available only to heterosexuals. The report also highlights examples of such discriminatory effects as provided by the stories from individual citizens. â€œAfter several months of consideration and public discussion, this report delivers the right path for creating basic fairness in the law,â€• said Kulongoski. â€œI look forward to working with members of the Legislature to move these recommendations forward.â€• For a copy of the report: http://governor.oregon.gov/Gov/pdf/letters/TaskforceOnEquality.pdf