



**Testimony**  
**HB 2661-Human Rights Commission**  
**House State Government Operations and Accountability Committee**  
**January 16, 2006**

The Washington State Catholic Conference (WSCC) represents the Catholic bishops of Washington State on public policy issues.

The Catholic Church is not in favor of harassment or unjust discrimination. The teaching of our Church makes it clear that the fundamental human rights of homosexual persons must be defended and that all of us must strive to eliminate any form of injustice, oppression or violence against them (*The Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*). Moreover, it is not sufficient only to avoid unjust discrimination. Homosexual persons “must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

HB 2661 amends the present civil rights legislation to give "sexual orientation" the same status in law as "race, creed, color, national origin, sex, marital status, age, or the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical handicap." But it is not the same. The granting of protected civil rights status on the basis of one's sexual orientation oversimplifies serious and complex questions.

Many Americans are quite willing to respect gays and lesbians as persons, but they do not want to be legally bound to accept a broader activist agenda. Expecting all of us to acknowledge all sexual behaviors as equivalent is to require a substantive societal change with no moral consensus. This is neither respectful of personal conscience nor faithful to the democratic process.

In our current cultural context, gay rights are being promoted. Some favor making homosexual relationships as normal as marriage, both legally and morally. Under this proposed bill, those who wish these relationships promoted and protected may have legal cause for action. HB 2661 is not morally neutral.

At this point, WSCC cannot support the legislation in this form. On the face of it, HB 2661 is about protecting homosexual persons from discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, credit, insurance, and commercial transactions. We are supportive of such protections, provided the common good of the entire society is also protected. Our discomfort comes from looking more closely at the present vehicle for providing this protection, expanding the jurisdiction of the Human Rights Commission, and trying to consider the potential implications.

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The definition used to describe “sexual orientation” in HB 2661 contains vague and inappropriate language. It is not a definition that one would normally associate with the words “sexual orientation.” A more appropriate definition of sexual orientation is “a biological or affectional inclination or attraction to a person of the opposite sex or the same sex.”

In order to address unjust discrimination against homosexual individuals, one suggestion would be to approach each section of law and discuss the appropriate protection that society wishes to accord within that section of the law. We support responsible efforts to end unjust discrimination; but we desire to do so in ways faithful to our beliefs and in a manner that looks first to the common good.

Thank you.

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