



## Lawrence group seeks legal protection for transgender people

By Chad Lawhorn  
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A Lawrence group is asking the city to change its anti-discrimination law to protect people who consider themselves transgender.

The Lawrence-Douglas County Chapter of the Kansas Equality Coalition has sent a letter asking commissioners to include transgender protection as part of the city's human rights ordinance. The change would make it illegal for landlords and employers to deny someone housing or a job based on their transgender identity.

"They deserve this," Maggie Childs, chair of the coalition, said of the proposed legal protection. "It is just clear to me that this is a very vulnerable group."

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "transgender" as "having personal characteristics (as transsexuality or transvestism) that transcend traditional gender boundaries and corresponding sexual norms."

City commissioners are expected to officially receive the letter at their meeting on Tuesday evening. Commissioners, though, are not expected to debate the proposal. Instead, they plan to send the issue to the city's Human Relations Commission for a recommendation. The issue likely won't come back to the commission until after the April 7 City Commission elections.

There will be some opposition to the change, said the Rev. Leo Barbee, pastor of Victory Bible Church in Lawrence. Barbee said that transgender individuals are engaging in deviant and sinful behavior, and that landlords and employers should be allowed to judge people on their behavior.

"They are saying that this is my lifestyle, and I'm going to make you accept it regardless," said Barbee, who has come out in opposition to previous Lawrence issues regarding homosexual rights. "I think a person has a right to say no. I don't agree with your lifestyle, and I'm not mandated to accept it."

Childs said people who are transgender generally don't consider it to be a lifestyle choice.

"When they talk about transitioning, they talk about how that is the first time their outside has felt in sync with their inside," Childs said. "They don't talk about it as a choice."

The city's human rights ordinance already is unique in the state. Since the mid-1990s, Lawrence has been the only city in the state where it is illegal to discriminate against a person on the basis of sexual orientation. Lawrence also became the first city in the state to create a domestic partnership registry that gives some legal recognition to same-sex couples. That registry was created in 2007 after the Kansas Equality Coalition lobbied for it.

**Childs said recent research indicates that 108 cities or counties across the country have anti-discrimination laws that protect transgender people. Those include: Kansas City, Mo.; Boulder, Colo.; Champaign, Ill.; Austin, Texas; and Iowa City, Iowa, according to information from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.**

Childs said she wasn't aware of any publicized incidents of discrimination or hate crimes against transgender people in Lawrence. But the coalition's letter points to a 1993 murder — the subject of the film "Boys Don't Cry" in Lincoln, Neb. It also points to a 2007 case in Florida where a city manager was fired after transitioning from a male to a female.

"It is not that we've had a spate of problems in Lawrence, but we would rather be proactive and encourage awareness and acceptance before we have a tragedy," Childs said.

Groups that may be required to abide by the new law generally were just learning of it for the first time on Friday. Matt Hoy, an attorney for the Lawrence Apartment Association, said his group would study the proposal.

"Our members will want to thoughtfully review it," Hoy said.