



An Oklahoma Where Everyone is Equal

MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Laura A. Belmonte
Vice-President
TEN – The Equality Network
918.906.2134
lbelmonte@theequalitynetwork.org

New Report Shows Surprising Gains for Gay Oklahomans

Tulsa, Oklahoma – June 16, 2010 – With the Tulsa City Council poised to add sexual orientation to its nondiscrimination policies for public employees, a new report by the TEN Institute, the research arm of The Equality Network, reveals that several Oklahoma municipalities already extend these protections to their gay employees.

Preliminary data from an ongoing project documenting municipal policies on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) citizens challenge long-standing assumptions that LGBT Oklahomans have virtually no legal protections at the local level.

“When we began this research, we expected only to validate the widespread belief that few communities protect their LGBT citizens here. To our great surprise and joy, we found that many smaller cities have already adopted LGBT-inclusive policies for their public employees.” explains Kathy L. Williams, Ph.D., president of The Equality Network.

Del City, Altus, McAlester, Miami, and Vinita all have nondiscrimination policies including sexual orientation among the categories protected in the hiring, promotion, and retention of public employees.

Another group of municipalities do not offer employment protections for their LGBT public employees, but include sexual orientation in their anti-harassment personnel policies. These include Muskogee, Noble, Chickasha, and Perry.

Oklahoma City is the only municipality with an ordinance outlawing harassment, intimidation, or assault based on sexual orientation. This protection is particularly significant because the state's hate crimes law does not currently encompass sexual orientation.

Currently, there are no municipalities in Oklahoma that include gender identity or expression among the protected categories for either public employees or the general citizenry.

The study also shows that Ponca City, Cushing, and Sallisaw appear to sanction housing discrimination against gay people. For example, in defining what constitutes a disability, Cushing's housing ordinance states "'handicap' does not apply to an individual because of sexual orientation or the sexual preference of the individual or because that individual is a transvestite." The Ponca City and Sallisaw housing ordinances are worded similarly.

"We were stunned to discover such bizarre and offensive assertions enshrined in public policy in 2010. These three communities are clinging to characterizations of LGBT people that the medical and psychological establishments rejected almost forty years ago. While we agree wholeheartedly that being gay is not a disability, we believe that allowing landlords to bar LGBT people from renting an apartment for which they qualify as tenants is blatant discrimination." stated Williams.

TEN Institute will continue to solicit municipal policies on LGBT Oklahomans and will integrate them into its Municipal Equality Database. The preliminary findings may be accessed at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/33127989/Municipalities-Database>

####

[The Equality Network](#) works to achieve equality and to secure legal protection for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Oklahomans through advocacy, coalition building, and individual empowerment in the political process..