

**CITY OF CHARLOTTE
OFFICE OF THE CITY ATTORNEY
Memorandum**

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Robert E. Hagemann, City Attorney

DATE: February 3, 2015

RE: Non-Discrimination

At your November 24, 2014 meeting, Scott Bishop of the Human Rights Campaign gave a presentation in which he proposed adding marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity to the list of protected characteristics in several City non-discrimination ordinances. In response, Council asked me to prepare a briefing paper and to draft a proposed ordinance that would implement the request.

History of Protected Characteristics

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided, among other things, broad federal protections against discrimination in public accommodations based on race, color, religion, and national origin (Title II) and in employment based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin (Title VII). Protections against employment discrimination based on age (1967) and disability (1990) were subsequently enacted.

There are no federal laws that expressly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender identity. However beginning with an ordinance adopted by the City of Minneapolis in 1975, and according to the attached FAQ from the Human Rights Campaign, seventeen states (North Carolina is not one of them), the District of Columbia, and more than 225 cities and counties have passed laws prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

City Ordinances

1. Public Accommodations

In 1968 the Charlotte City Council adopted an ordinance prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations. The ordinance was based on the 1964 federal law and covered race, color, religion, and national origin. In 1972, the Council amended the ordinance to include sex.

As part of the 1985 recodification of the entire City Code, the public accommodations ordinance was modified to treat sex differently than race, color, religion, and national origin, establishing protections only in restaurants, hotels, and motels, and even then

carving out restrooms, bathhouses and similar facilities which are in their nature distinctly private, as well as dormitory lodging facilities such as the YMCA and YWCA.

While we have been unable to find any documentation that clearly states the reasons for this change in approach, the City Attorney at the time believes it was recommended by the contractor for the recodification likely due to lingering concerns stemming from the debate over the Equal Rights Amendment which some argued would do away with single sex restrooms.

The public accommodations ordinance does not specify an enforcement mechanism, but pursuant to state law, a violation of the ordinance is enforceable as a misdemeanor (fine up to \$500, no active time unless three previous violations) or through equitable relief (*i.e.*, a court order directing a cessation of the violation). In practice, the Community Relations Committee typically seeks voluntary compliance through a conciliation process.

2. Community Relations Committee

At the same time the 1968 public accommodations ordinance was adopted, Council established the Community Relations Committee. Among the Committee's duties is a charge to provide an annual report that may include "recommendations of the committee for legislation or other actions to eliminate or reduce discrimination with respect to [the protected characteristics]". In addition, through the conciliation process, the Committee is authorized to "[a]pprove or disapprove plans to eliminate or reduce discrimination with respect to [the protected characteristics]".

3. Passenger Vehicles for Hire

The passenger vehicles for hire ordinance provides that "[n]o company operating certificate holder, vehicle operating permit holder, or driver shall refuse or neglect to transport any person on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin". The ordinance is enforced through civil penalties and revocation of operating certificates and permits.

4. Commercial Non-Discrimination

The commercial non-discrimination ordinance was adopted in 2003 as part of the Council's response to the dismantling of the woman and minority business development program after the City was sued in federal court. The ordinance prohibits businesses that seek to contract with the City from "discriminating in the solicitation, selection, hiring or treatment of vendors, suppliers, subcontractors or commercial customers on the basis of race, gender, religion, national origin, ethnicity, age, or disability." The ordinance provides for enforcement through the rescission, suspension or termination of a current contract, and the disqualification from bidding and contract awards for a period of not more than two years.

Description of Proposed Amendments

The proposed amendments would simply add “marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression” to the list of protected characteristics in the passenger vehicles for hire and commercial non-discrimination ordinances as well as the list of protected characteristics that the Community Relations Committee is authorized to make recommendations for legislation or other actions to eliminate or reduce discrimination and to approve or disapprove plans to eliminate discrimination through the conciliation process.

With regards to the public accommodations ordinance, the proposed amendments would not only add these five characteristics to the general prohibition of discrimination, but would also add “sex” to the general prohibition and delete the separate section dealing with sex. This would bring the City’s ordinance in line with the trend across the country of not carving out “sex” in an attempt to preserve the right of businesses to provide separate restroom facilities (*i.e.*, it is not discriminatory to provide separate men’s and women’s restroom facilities).

Regarding the concerns expressed at the November 24 meeting, the Human Rights Campaign asked me to provide the attached document that provides some perspectives from twelve states.

enclosures