

## Rights proposal expected to get OK

## Ordinance wording changed after area Catholics objected

By TOM LAMBERT

Lansing State Journal

Lansing appears poised to approve a controversial human rights ordinance after making changes to try to appease concerns by some local religious groups.

The City Council will take up the measure at its meeting 7 p.m. Monday at City Hall.

The ordinance would, among other things, prohibit harassment and discrimination based on race, age, height, weight, political affiliation or belief, sexual orientation and gender identity.

City Attorney Brigham Smith said under the ordinance and the First Amendment, a religious organization still could restrict employment opportunities based on those factors in certain situations. For instance, the Catholic Church would be within its rights not to hire a gay priest.

Some Diocese of Lansing leaders wanted exemptions extended to individual members of their faith to

### TO ATTEND

The Lansing City Council will meet at 7 p.m. Monday on the 10th floor of City Hall, 124 W. Michigan Ave., and is expected to pass a controversial human rights ordinance.

### THE PROPOSAL

The proposal prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, religion, ancestry, color, sex, age, height, weight, student status, marital status, familial status, military discharge status, political affiliation or belief, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, mental or physical limitation or source of income.

### THE CHANGE

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Lansing proposed adding the following exemption to the ordinance, but the city has declined:

"This ordinance does not limit the right of an individual or an organization of any kind to speak, write or assemble, act or refrain from acting in accordance with religious

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alleviate the concerns, Smith said.

## Compromise language

"It's not as broad as what the Diocese had proposed," Smith said. "I think they recognized that the compromise language is broad enough to address many of their concerns and that this language is probably as good as it gets."

Mike Murray, the attorney representing the diocese, and Michael Diebold, spokesman for the Diocese of Lansing, didn't re-

turn phone calls late last week.

Councilwoman Kathie Dunbar, who spearheaded the effort to pass the ordinance, said it is a solid proposal.

"It's a positive step for the city of Lansing," she said.

Dean Ford, 54, of East Lansing, said the ordinance is much needed.

"There is too much discrimination in the world today, and it's just not necessary," said Ford. "If



Dunbar

the ordinance just prevents some of the discrimination that goes on now, then it will be a success."

## Opposition

Gary Glenn, president of the Midland-based American Family Association of Michigan, said his group will attempt to prevent the human rights proposal from passing.

If it is adopted, he said he would start a petition drive to overturn the measure.

About 5 percent of the city's 87,396 registered voters — or 4,370 voters — would need to

## On the Web

► For a copy of the revised human rights proposal, go to [www.lsj.com](http://www.lsj.com).

sign the petition for the ordinance to be placed before residents for a vote, city officials said.

The latest proposal, which carries a fine of up to \$500, is similar to one the City Council passed in 1996, which carried a maximum fine of \$15,000. Voters later rejected that measure.

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