

Memo regarding a Resolution to Declare Stevenson a Sanctuary City for Gender Diverse People

In February 2026, Kansas passed a law immediately invalidating the driver's licenses of all transgender people in the state who have updated their gender marker, putting them at risk of criminal charges for driving with a license that doesn't match their appearance or gender expression, and potentially making them unable to vote due to the state's voter ID law. It also imposes possible civil and criminal penalties for using public restrooms and other sex-segregated spaces.

In recent years, similar laws restricting the rights of trans people to participate equally in society have been introduced and/or passed in most states, as well as in the US House of Representatives. Many aim to criminalize drag performances by defining any form of "cross-sex" expression as sexually explicit, which would put trans people at risk of being arrested for "obscenity" simply for wearing their own clothing in public. These laws endanger not only trans people, but also intersex people and cisgender men and women, primarily those who are gender nonconforming, or whose physical appearance does not match stereotypical assumptions about their sex. I refer to this affected population broadly as gender diverse people.

Roughly half a million US trans people have already fled their home states since the November 2024 election, many moving to Washington and Oregon due to our high-quality healthcare and supportive community values. They will continue coming here, in search of communities where they have equal rights to life, liberty, and self-expression. Portland especially is known for its large and growing transgender population. We have a thriving queer community in Stevenson, and trans and queer people who live in larger cities like Portland and Seattle often vacation in the Columbia Gorge. Despite state-level protections, trans people in our communities experience disproportionately high rates of poverty, homelessness, violence, and other harmful outcomes.

On February 26th, the Washington Supreme Court ruled that my protest activity last year was lawful and constitutionally protected speech. I believe it would be in our best interest as a city to establish policies that help ensure what happened to me does not happen to others in the future. This resolution as written upholds the equal rights of all cis women and intersex people, in addition to transgender people. It would affirm our commitment to defend constitutional rights equally for all members of our community, and direct the development of any necessary policies to do so. This resolution is based on a very similar one passed recently by the Olympia City Council. It is a bare-minimum first step toward addressing the economic and social hardship that gender diverse people are experiencing in America today.

Failure to defend the constitutional rights of all people in our community would risk legal liability for the city, financial costs for our constituents, and would also send a message that this is not a safe community for queer tourists. Trans people from Portland, many of whom have fled dangerous and abusive situations in other states, aren't going to feel safe vacationing here if they risk being targeted by the authorities for their self-expression.

Lucy Lauser, Councilmember #3