

OPEN LETTER
FROM WASHINGTON FAITH LEADERS TO OUR FELLOW FAITH LEADERS
REGARDING INITIATIVE 1552

May 24, 2017

Dear Fellow Faith Leaders:

We are followers of many different faiths that share a basic common tenet: love our neighbors as ourselves — including those who may seem different from us.

Like many people, there was a time when we didn't know much about what it meant to be transgender. Because so few of us personally know a transgender person, the idea of a person being born one gender but knowing themselves to be another can sound unusual, confusing and may be a bit uncomfortable at first.

Now more and more of our congregants express to us their journeys of confusion, acceptance, love, and also worry for the safety of their transgender family members, friends, co-workers and neighbors.

Like many of our congregants, we're concerned about the impacts of a proposed ballot initiative – I-1552 - that seeks to repeal the last decade of Washington's non-discrimination protections for transgender people.

The supporters of I-1552 say safety and privacy are their goals. Many of us are parents, and it's only natural to worry about the well-being of our families and children, especially when we hear so many tragic stories about people victimized by physical assaults or sexual violence.

But when we're anxious or concerned, it's important to step back and get the facts.

That's why we listen to our law enforcement and violence-prevention experts. These leaders, like former Snohomish County Sheriff John Lovick and the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, know that non-discrimination laws permitting transgender men and women to use public facilities that match their gender are not, and have never been, a threat to anyone's safety.

In fact, they say I-1552 would do nothing to improve public safety. It might even make things worse by encouraging strangers to confront and question others in public facilities and violate each other's privacy and safety by demanding proof of "sex at birth."

This is not how we, as people of faith, treat each other. We should not single out our transgender neighbors for different treatment and potentially put their safety at risk with a proposal that would have unintended consequences for all of us.

We have prayed about this and come to believe that protecting people from discrimination is about treating others as we want to be treated — including people who are transgender — and we should all be treated equally under the law.

Please search your heart and do not allow the backers of I-1552 to sow fear and distrust among us. And if you feel so called, please join us in opposing I-1552 by signing here:

<http://action.wawont.org/page/s/i1552-faith>

Signed,

Bishop B. Kirby Unti, Northwest Washington Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Greg Rickel, Episcopal Diocese of Olympia

Presiding Elder Spencer Barrett of the African Methodist Episcopal Church

President R. Skyler Oberst, Spokane Interfaith Council

Rabbi Bruce Kadden, Temple Beth El

Rabbi Jason Levine, Temple Beth Am

Reverend David Wright, University of Puget Sound

Rabbi Daniel Weiner, Temple De Hirsch Sinai

Reverend Paul Benz, Faith Action Network

Reverend Michael Denton, Conference Minister, Pacific Northwest Conference of The United Church of Christ