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**Equality Works Seeks Truthful Discussion on Proposed Ordinance
*Sets Record Straight on Mayor's Proposal to End Discrimination in Anchorage***

ANCHORAGE, AK, June 1, 2009 — Equality Works, a coalition of Alaska Organizations working to end discrimination in Anchorage, today announced a coordinated effort to ensure that debate about the proposed equal rights Ordinance focuses on the facts.

Jackie Buckley, spokesperson for Equality Works stated: “Equality Works believes that workers in Anchorage should be judged solely on their qualifications and the merits of their work, and that no one should have to deny who they are in order to keep an apartment or a job. We know that the vast majority of Anchorage residents want to protect their friends, neighbors, family and coworkers from discrimination or harassment.”

“Unfortunately, there has been an effort to misrepresent what the proposed updates to the Municipality’s Equal Rights law would do,” continued Buckley. “It is important that in considering Anchorage’s future and the kind of city we strive to be, that we base our decisions on facts — not unfounded and unproven fears.”

- **Anchorage already has a nondiscrimination law.** However, because “sexual orientation” is not currently a protected class, the Anchorage Equal Rights Commission has no jurisdiction to track or investigate these cases of suspected discrimination. The Anchorage Equal Rights Commission has unanimously endorsed 2009-64, the proposed Ordinance updates. Supporters of equality are only asking that sexual orientation be included in the list of protected classes for a law that is already on the books.
- **Anchorage’s nondiscrimination law has *never* prohibited businesses from establishing standards of conduct and behavior suitable for the marketplace and other professional settings.** The majority of Fortune 500 companies, including some with a local presence — such as BP, Alaska Airlines, and Wells Fargo — have voluntarily adopted internal policies to protect people from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation/gender identity. These corporations understand that LGBT-inclusive nondiscrimination policies help to recruit and retain a more diverse, talented, and productive workforce. **No clause in the proposed Ordinance requires an employer, business owner, or realtor to tolerate anyone, regardless of sexual orientation or**

gender identity, who behaves in an inappropriate, disruptive or unprofessional manner, including in a restroom or other facilities.

- **The US Constitution’s Bill of Rights promises *every* American the freedom to practice their religion and express their opinion without persecution.** The Municipality of Anchorage recognizes those rights by including “religion” as a protected class in its current nondiscrimination laws, and the Ordinance includes language that allows churches and other religious organizations to limit access or admission to those who share their beliefs.
- People need protection from discrimination on the basis of their gender identity/expression. No one — straight or gay — should be treated unfairly in work or the public sphere. Equality Works believes the small minority of transgender people in our community — people who have served in our military, who drive our taxis, and who have children and families to provide for — are no less deserving of employment and housing than anyone else. **While some in our community try to paint transgender people as a dangerous threat, transgender men and women are far more likely to be the targets of violent harassment and discrimination than those who would refuse them equal opportunity under the law.**

Equality Works is a coalition of organizations and individuals working to protect Anchorage citizens from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in matters of employment, housing, and public accommodations, and includes the Alaska Women's Lobby, Alaska Women's Political Caucus, Alaskans Together for Equality, Alliance for Reproductive Justice-Alaska, American Civil Liberties Union of Alaska, Anchorage Education Association, Anchorage Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Anchorage Urban League, Association of Fundraising Professionals-Alaska Chapter, Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network-Anchorage (GLSEN), Identity, Inc., Immanuel Presbyterian Church, League of Women Voters of Anchorage, National Association of Social Workers-Alaska Chapter, Parents, Friends and Families of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest.

More information regarding the true facts about the proposed Ordinance may be found at: <http://www.equalityworks.org/29101.html>

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