



May 9, 2013

Testimony of Urban League of Portland on HB 2668 – Civil Rights Protections in Public Accommodation.

Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee; the Urban League of Portland urges your support of HB 2863 – Civil Rights Protections in Public Accommodation. The Urban League of Portland is 68 years old this year. As an advocacy organization, we have been engaged in some of the key anti-discrimination battles in the state, including campaigns against the accommodation laws that excluded African Americans from restaurants and hotels. There is a photograph of the signing of the first Civil Rights Bill in 1953 hanging in the halls of this Capitol, which also has pride of place in the Urban League's offices in Portland.

Much progress has been made since 1953, however discrimination and discriminatory behavior is unfortunately still a part of the daily life of many Oregonians. People of color, members of the LGBTQ community and people in religious dress face bullying, slurs and sometimes exclusion from public places that may not fall under the current law; places like parks or government buildings that are not commercial entities. It is unfortunate that the Supreme Court case of *Schwenk v. Boy Scouts*, muddied the waters by implying that public accommodations law may apply only to entities with a commercial interest. This interpretation appears contrary to the current language in the statute and could be viewed as excluding some government bodies, city or state agencies, where no money is exchanged, from the non-discrimination law.

Our organization regularly received complaints from our clients who feel that they have been suffered discriminatory practices or language in a public park, on a public thoroughfare or outside of a commercial establishment on city property.

HB 2668 clarifies the public accommodations law to keep consistent with the original intent, that all public places should be free from discrimination.

All public places should be viewed as public accommodations, unless they are strictly exempt by the law. Oregon law should be crystal clear. We urge you to support this bill.