



Bill to protect gays, lesbians

By BRIAN DUGGAN
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A bill that would prevent discrimination of gays and lesbians under North Dakota human rights and fair housing law is expected to be introduced on Monday, Sen. Tom Fiebiger, D-Fargo, said Thursday.

If passed, the bill would add sexual orientation among the protected classes under the North Dakota Human Rights Act, which bans discrimination for housing, employment, credit transactions and the use of public accommodation.

Fiebiger is the lead sponsor of the bill, and said he and other lawmakers will introduce the legislation on Monday, while the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition stages press conferences in support of the bill in Fargo, Grand Forks and Minot.

"These are our sons and daughters, or brothers and sisters," Fiebiger said. "The thought is, in North Dakota we treat people the same, and we shouldn't treat people differently because of who they love."

Mitch Marr, the executive director of the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition, called the bill a "big step forward" for the state, adding that Montana is considering a similar law.

Twenty states and the District of Columbia already have similar protections for gays and lesbians on the books, including Minnesota, which passed its law in 1993, according to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

"If we have Minnesota on the east that has all these protections, and Montana on the west with all these protections, and North Dakota in the middle, a lot of these young people are going to go elsewhere," Marr said.

The protected classes already under state law include race, color, religion, sex, disability, age, familial status, national origin, or status with respect to marriage or public assistance.