

Officials, activists ask city to back transgender rights By Rudolph Bush

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A transgender advocacy group joined several city, county and state officials Friday in calling for expanded discrimination protection for cross-dressers and transsexuals under Chicago's Human Rights Ordinance.

Meeting in the city's Commission on Human Relations office at 740 N. Sedgwick St., members of It's Time Illinois outlined a proposed amendment to the Human Rights Ordinance that would add "gender identity" to the list of classes now protected from housing, employment and credit discrimination. "Today, I cannot file [a discrimination complaint] unless I fit one of the current protected classes," said transgender activist Lorraine Sade Baskerville, who dresses as a woman. "Well, I am here to tell you I am not disabled, I am not gay, I am not a lesbian."

The group also presented a report that tracked 108 incidents of discrimination against transgender people since 1995.

Changing the city ordinance could prevent similar incidents, said Miranda Stevens-Miller, political director for It's Time Illinois.

Proponents of the ordinance defined gender identity as "the actual or perceived appearance, expression, identity, or behavior of a person as being male or female, whether or not that appearance, expression, identity or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with the person's designated birth."

The group says it already has the support of 20 aldermen, and named Aids. Bernard J. Hansen and Billy Ocasio as sponsors. Their offices confirmed their support, but neither alderman was available for comment Friday.

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill) attended the announcement and hailed the proposed amendment as a civil-rights breakthrough.

"All of us here share a sense of obligation to make sure we do change the policy," Schakowsky said.

The amendment also was supported by state Reps. Sara Feigenholtz and Larry McKeon and Cook County Commissioner Mike Quigley.

Clarence Wood, chairman of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, said he did not know whether Mayor Richard Daley had taken a position on the amendment but said it was unlikely because Daley had not seen the recommended language of the amendment.