

Position paper of LeAP! That was read at the Senate during the Public Hearing of the Anti-discrimination Bill (SB 1738) on Wednesday, August 09, 2006.

## **LESBIAN ADVOCATES PHILIPPINES (LeAP!), INC. PUSHES FOR THE PASSAGE OF AN ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAW**

One lesbian was brought to a gynecologist by her mother and forced to undergo a medical examination, to check if she has all the female parts. Another was denied employment by a company that said it was hiring “females” – thus barring the entry of lesbians who are not seen by some as women. When a lesbian was hired, she was praised for her efficient work, and then informed that her appearance was not suitable for the company image. Another was removed from her church membership. Another was bypassed for promotion, and yet another resigned when the company refused to address and put a stop to harassment committed by her co-employees. By virtue of unbearable working conditions, she was constructively dismissed.

These are just some of the cases documented by the Lesbian Advocates Philippines (LeAP!) Inc. in its research *Unmasked: Faces of Discrimination Against Lesbians in the Philippines* published in December 2004.

These instances went unchecked because there was, and there still is, no law to protect lesbians against discrimination.

The Lesbian Advocates Philippines (LeAP!), Inc. calls for the immediate passage of Senate Bills No. 165, 1641, 1738 of Senators Loi Ejercito Estrada, Miriam Defensor Santiago, and Ramon Bong Revilla, Jr. respectively. The Anti-discrimination bill seeks to penalize various forms of discrimination against lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders in the Philippines.

Your Honors, we need an Anti-Discrimination Law. Because of the absence of such a measure, lesbians as a sector remain exposed to abuses that curtail basic rights that other citizens are entitled to. We want to exercise our basic human rights.

We, our right to have access to public service, we want equal employment opportunities, we want our right to education, our right to organize, our right to have access to medical and health services, and our right to have access to establishments and housing. Lesbians in the Philippines are still vulnerable to the dangers of forced medical or psychological examination, and to harassment by law enforcement officers.

To this day, there is no protection.

The State cannot simply allow discrimination to continue. It needs an Anti-Discrimination Law to bring about the much-needed protection to lesbians who suffer from and remain targets of discrimination.

Unfortunately, though it is responsible for the welfare of all its citizens, the failure of the State to safeguard these rights seems to indicate an implied condonation of the discrimination, making the State equally responsible as if it were the perpetrator.

Passing the Anti-Discrimination Law is the ultimate expression of support that the State can give to the members of its citizenry. It will testify to the State's willingness to honor its commitments under international law. It will send out the clear message that discrimination will be taken seriously and that violators will be punished.

An Anti-Discrimination Law will affirm that in the Philippines, the rights of lesbians, as well as gays, bisexuals and transgenders are indeed, HUMAN RIGHTS.

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