

Task Force on Equality – May 2006 Meeting

The Governor's Task Force on Equality held its second meeting May 25 in Salem. The meeting was a work session and served as an opportunity for members to learn more about current anti-discrimination law and enforcement mechanisms and the legislative history of the 2005 anti-discrimination and civil union legislative proposals.

Marcia Ohlemiller, a lawyer with the Bureau of Labor and Industries, discussed current state anti-discrimination laws and city and county anti-discrimination ordinances that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The BOLI civil rights division investigates complaints of discrimination, makes findings and can order damage awards. BOLI is under contract with many cities and counties to enforce their anti-discrimination laws. Ohlemiller fielded questions from the members about how the enforcement process works and how it relates to the court system. Ohlemiller brought statistics showing the number of complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity filed under nine city and county anti-discrimination ordinances. Those statistics will soon be available on the Equality Task Force's website, the link to which can be found on the Governor's webpage, <http://governor.oregon.gov/>.

Ohlemiller also discussed *Tanner v. OHSU*, the Court of Appeals opinion that required OHSU to provide benefits to same sex domestic partners under the privileges and immunities clause of the Oregon Constitution. Ohlemiller's discussion of the disparate laws in the discrimination field illustrated the patchwork of protection in the state.

Tiffany Harris, an attorney with Schwabe, Williamson & Wyatt, and the 2005 Oregon Legislature's Rules Committee administrator, walked the members through a timeline of the 2005 legislative session and Senate Bill 1000 – the civil union and anti-discrimination bill – and related legislation. Harris discussed arguments in opposition to the proposed legislation and played for the committee excerpts from public hearings on the proposals.

Members discussed a future work plan and additional information they would like to assist them. The next meeting is June 30 in Portland at the BOLI offices. The minutes from the May 25 meeting and links to materials provided to the members will be available on the Task Force website.