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# Recent Developments: House Bill 315: Anti-Discrimination Act

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## HOUSE BILL 315: ANTI-DISCRIMINATION ACT

By Richard Dirk Selland

Article 49B of the Maryland Code currently prohibits discrimination in employment, public accommodations, housing, education, and health and welfare services. It also protects against discrimination based on race, creed, color, religion, age, national origin, ancestry, sex, marital status, and physical or mental handicap. The legislation (SB 138 / HB 315) proposed in 1999 would have simply amended Article 49B to add "sexual orientation" to this list. It would have given lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals the same civil rights protections given to other minority groups that have been recognized as being targeted for discrimination.

The Maryland Human Relations Commission would have enforced the law in the same way it now enforces protection against discrimination. Persons who experience discrimination would file complaints with the Commission which would investigate the complaints and enforce the law as appropriate.

With the help of Maryland Governor Parris N. Glendening, history was made in Maryland as HB 315 moved to the Senate. Breaking precedent on March 12, 1999, the Governor testified before the House Judiciary Committee and reminded them that he signed similar protections into law in 1991 as County Executive of Prince George's County "and Western Civilization hasn't collapsed as a result." The House voted 80 to 56 in favor of the Bill marking the first time such legislation passed one side of the legislature. However, the Bill was subsequently stalled in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee where it did not muster enough support.

### **Other sexual orientation issues:**

A bill to *ban same-sex marriages* in Maryland, HB 1128, co-sponsored by Delegates Carmen Amedori (R-Carroll) and Emmett Burns (D-Balt. Co., City) was handily defeated in the House Judiciary Committee on March 26. The Bill sought to limit the definition of marriage to "a legal union between a man and a woman as a husband and wife."

Maryland's proposed *Hate Crimes Act*, HB 969, a bill which would add additional penalties to crimes committed against someone based on their sexual orientation, was voted on favorably by the same committee on March 27, 1999 and moved to the full House for a vote where it passed overwhelmingly 111 to 23. The Bill has subsequently stalled in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee where it has not mustered enough votes to leave the Committee.