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**State Government Operations &  
Accountability Committee**

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**HB 2661**

**Brief Description:** Expanding the jurisdiction of the human rights commission.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Murray, Hankins, Pettigrew, Jarrett, McDermott, Grant, Lovick, Haigh, Moeller, Shabro, Santos, Kessler, Upthegrove, Tom, Hunter, Hasegawa, Walsh, Fromhold, Springer, Appleton, McCoy, Chase, Hudgins, Kenney, Lantz, Hunt, Darneille, Quall, Takko, Sommers, Williams, Sells, Green, Schual-Berke, Simpson, Clibborn, Conway, Linville, Cody, Kagi, B. Sullivan, McIntire, Dickerson, Miloscia, Roberts and Ormsby; by request of Governor Gregoire.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Expands the jurisdiction of the human rights commission to include sexual orientation as a basis for prohibiting discrimination.
- Adds definitions for sexual orientation and gender expression or identity to Washington's Law Against Discrimination.
- Exempts from Washington's Law Against Discrimination those real estate transactions that include the sharing, rental, or sublease of a dwelling unit when the dwelling unit is to be occupied by the owner or sublesor.

**Hearing Date:** 1/17/06

**Staff:** Kathryn Leathers (786-7114).

**Background:**

Washington's Law Against Discrimination establishes that it is a civil right to be free from discrimination based on race, color, creed, national origin, sex, the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal. This right applies to employment; places of public resort, accommodation, or amusement; commerce; and real estate, credit, and insurance transactions.

To effectuate the right to be free from discrimination, the law defines certain practices as being unfair. For example, it is deemed to be an unfair practice to fire or to refuse to hire a person based on sex, race, creed, color, national origin, marital status, the presence of any sensory or physical disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal.

There are some exceptions to the Law Against Discrimination. For example, in the employment context, employers with fewer than eight employees and non-profit religious or sectarian organizations are exempt from these laws.

The Washington State Human Rights Commission (WSHRC) is responsible, in part, for administering and enforcing the Law Against Discrimination. The WSHRC receives and investigates complaints made by persons alleging unfair practices in violation of this law. If the WSHRC finds that there is reasonable cause to believe that discrimination has occurred, it must first try to eliminate the unfair practice via conference and conciliation. If this process fails, the WSHRC must refer the matter to an administrative law judge who may, after a hearing on the matter, issue an order providing relief to the complainant.

**Summary of Bill:**

The Law Against Discrimination is expanded to prohibit discrimination based on a person's sexual orientation. "Sexual orientation" is defined as heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and gender expression or identity. "Gender expression or identity" is defined as having or being perceived as having a gender identity, self-image, appearance, behavior, or expression, whether or not that gender identity, self-image, appearance, behavior, or expression is different from that traditionally associated with the sex assigned to that person at birth.

Exempts from Washington's Law Against Discrimination those real estate transactions that include the sharing, rental, or sublease of a dwelling unit when the dwelling unit is to be occupied by the owner or sublessor.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.