

Regional Alliance, others back updates to state civil rights act

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By the Midland Daily News

Great Lakes Bay Area economic development and business leaders announced their support for updates to Michigan's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA).

Adding their voices to the Michigan Competitive Workforce Coalition, which backs the addition of sexual orientation and gender identity protections under Michigan law, are the Great Lakes Bay Regional Alliance, Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce and Flint and Genesee Chamber of Commerce.

"We want to support efforts to make Michigan the most business friendly state possible," said Dave Dunn, chairman of the Great Lakes Bay Regional Alliance. "The reality is that we are competing against neighboring states in the Midwest that give these equal protections. It's long overdue for Michigan to enact legislation to treat every employee in an equal and fair manner."

The Great Lakes Bay Regional Alliance is made up of 48 board members who represent Midland, Bay, Isabella and Saginaw counties. The alliance's mission is to encourage, support and celebrate regional collaboration and initiatives that will improve the economic vitality and quality of life in the Great Lakes Bay Region.

Currently, the Elliott-Larsen act makes it illegal to subject people to differential treatment based on religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight, familial status or marital status. What's more, employers are prohibited from discriminating in hiring, compensation or the terms, conditions or employment privileges.

Sexual orientation and gender identity are not included under the Elliott-Larsen act, however, and many Michigan job providers see this as a barrier to attracting new skilled workers to the state's economy.

"It's long past time for Michigan to add these important protections to its civil rights law," said Jim Murray, one of the coalition co-chairs and president of AT&T Michigan. "In fact, many Michiganders aren't aware of the fact that it's not already there. But we need to be perfectly clear that our state's doors are open to the best and brightest talent — no matter what."

The Michigan Competitive Workforce Coalition provides a statewide forum and coordinating policy voice for individuals and organizations. Among its members is The Dow Chemical Co.

To learn more about the MCWC, visit <http://www.michewc.org>