



Chairman Wittich and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kim Leighton and I am here today to express my strong support for HB249, Medicaid expansion. I am a Montana resident, and the Regional Development Organizer for Pride Foundation—a regional community foundation that expands opportunities and advances full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth, adults, and families across the Northwest.

Due to a lack of statewide legal protections, many LGBT people across Montana—and the country—are struggling with unemployment, poverty, and access to healthcare. A recent national report found that single LGBT adults with children are three times as likely to have incomes near the poverty line as their non-LGBT peers.¹ Transgender Americans are almost four times more likely than the general population to have a household income under \$10,000 per year. Despite the fact that a large percentage of LGBT individuals have college degrees and contribute greatly to the workforce, they tend to make less money and often face discrimination when applying for employment.

In addition to the economic hardships faced by LGBT individuals, many also face barriers to accessing healthcare. A lack of legal protections means that LGBT people can be refused medically-necessary healthcare. Discrimination by healthcare providers is a common occurrence and can have a lasting impact on people's ability to get the care they need.

The refusal to recognize LGBT families in laws and employment policies also forces LGBT families to pay more for health insurance—leading to an average additional cost of \$3,000 per year.² When you consider all of these factors together, it is no surprise that LGBT individuals are more likely to be uninsured—leading to even higher medical costs and out-of-pocket expenses.

These factors also have dire consequences on the health and well-being of LGBT individuals, resulting in large disparities in health outcomes. For example, lesbians and bisexual women have a higher rate of obesity, smoking, and stress—all of which are risk factors for heart disease.³ Data also shows that in some cases, gay men are at increased risk for several types of cancer—including prostate, testicular, and colon cancers.⁴

This reality makes affordable health insurance even more critical for our community. We all deserve to have access to the healthcare we need to live a healthy and fulfilling life. The passage of HB249 would significantly impact the livelihood and well-being of Montanans—helping provide necessary healthcare to all our state's residents.

For all these reasons, I ask that you please vote yes on HB249. Thank you very much for your time.

¹ Movement Advancement Project, "Paying an Unfair Price: The Financial Penalty for Being LGBT in America," <http://www.lgbtmap.org/policy-and-issue-analysis/unfair-price>

² Ibid

³ Office on Women's Health, "Lesbian and bisexual health fact sheet," <http://womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/lesbian-bisexual-health.html>

⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Top Health Issues for LGBT Populations Information & Resource Kit," <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA12-4684/SMA12-4684.pdf>