



OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL

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**JACKSONVILLE CITY COUNCIL MEMBER BILL GULLIFORD INTRODUCES
HUMAN RIGHTS ORDINANCE WITH REFERENDUM REQUIREMENT**

Today I have filed the same Human Rights Ordinance that was voted on by the Jacksonville City Council in 2012 with one addition – a provision for a referendum by the voters on the issue. As a courtesy, I waited until after Mayor Curry’s final community conversation event on this topic before acting.

I have made Mayor Curry aware of this bill and have provided a copy of the legislation to him. He has not indicated support or opposition to my bill but was considerate in recognizing my right as a council member to offer such legislation. I want to compliment him for his community conversations. As Chairman of the Recreation, Community Development, Public Health and Safety Committee in 2012, I held four public hearings in an attempt to allow everyone to advance their points and opinions. While they were healthy public forums, I do not believe that they caused any substantial change in the direction or outcome of the debate.

Currently, based on recent comments and materials distributed by both proponents and opponents, it appears that we have irreconcilable differences between both sides of this issue which now appear to be more intractable than before.

During the time I have spent on the City Council, I have never seen an issue that brings out more passion and responses than this one. In 2012 we were overwhelmed with emails, letters, calls and constituent visits. This time they are starting out with even a stronger response from both sides, even without any legislation being considered as of yet. It begs the fundamental question – is it right that as few as ten people could decide the outcome of this very contentious issue without knowing the sentiment of the majority of citizens? In short, with the depth of participation already demonstrated, should citizens have a say on this beyond just public forums? Or, do we vote on it as council members somewhat influenced by our conscience, personal bias or intense lobbying?

We have held much less significant referendums and I think the outcome of the recent election in Atlantic Beach where the voters loudly stated that they wished to vote on the Atlantic Beach HRO speaks volumes to the desire of many people in that community to have a say. I already have received numerous emails requesting a referendum from citizens of Jacksonville.

Even with council approval of the ordinance there is no assurance that there would not be a referendum. In the past, based on displeasure with council action or lack thereof, we have seen citizen initiatives that brought forth referenda on tree protection and sign limitations, effectively changing the outcome of the council's action.

I have no personal agenda in this action, nor will I ever run again for public office. This is a purely objective assessment of what I think is the best potential procedure. I believe this is a responsible action and direction for the City Council and hope my colleagues will support the same.

Bill Gulliford, District 13
Jacksonville City Council