

For release Thursday, Oct. 25, 2018

Via email/statement

Subject line: Board of Commissioners statement on a gender inclusive workplace

At Multnomah County, we share a vision where all of our employees and communities feel a sense of safety, trust and belonging. So I am compelled to speak out when this vision and our values are being so seriously and dramatically challenged. Earlier this week, we learned that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is proposing to define gender as either male or female, unchangeable and determined by genitalia at birth.

Such a definition would eliminate legal protections for people who identify as transgender, non-binary and intersex, or who have ambiguous genitalia or certain other conditions at birth. It appears at odds with existing civil rights law, medical science, the knowledge of indigenous people, and our basic humanity. As Chair, and joined by my fellow board members, we will do everything in our power to push back on this proposed policy and provide protections dignity and respect for our transgender, non-binary, and intersex community members.

If we've learned anything from history it is that policies that seek to make marginalized communities invisible and unprotected under the law threaten our collective humanity.

We don't know yet what the final federal language will be. But I want to assure you that Multnomah County will not change its values of inclusion. Our Gender Inclusive Workplace Policy was written to support our gender diverse employees and the communities we serve. Information on how to connect with communities and information is on multco.us.

I am proud of the work we do at Multnomah County. To all those who would be affected, I want to say: We see you, we respect you, and we will serve you. As this philosopher and social critic Cornel West said, “Justice is what love looks like in public.”

Thank you,

Deborah

Deborah Kafoury, Multnomah County Chair

Sharon Meieran, District 1 Commissioner

Loretta Smith, District 2 Commissioner

Jessica Vega Pederson, District 3 Commissioner

Lori Stegmann, District 4 Commissioner