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✓ C.F. Anti-bias Law

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Santa Cruz considers tough anti-bias law

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

Job and housing discrimination based on "gender, sexual orientation, height, weight or personal appearance" would be banned in Santa Cruz under a law proposed by City Councilman Neal Coonerty.

"People had been talking to me about discrimination" over the past year or so, said Coonerty, adding that his proposal was spurred on by Gov. Pete Wilson's veto of a law banning discrimination against homosexuals.

Coonerty said the law "will serve to sensitize" businesses and landlords into avoiding discriminatory practices.

"We tend to stereotype people," he said.

The law "doesn't give anybody an advantage," Coonerty said. "It just makes a level playing field."

Coonerty, who owns Bookshop Santa Cruz, said he will seek the endorsement of the Chamber of Commerce before the council takes final action.

Employers shouldn't be scared of the ordinance, he said. "If you concentrate on ability and experience" rather than physical appearance, "you'll get the right people," he said.

The law would be an extension of the state and federal laws that already prohibit discrimination based on race, color, creed, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status and sex.

Coonerty said he took "bits and pieces" of other anti-discrimination laws around the country in drafting his proposal. He said a law that would have banned discrimination against homosexuals was rejected last year by voters in Concord.

Coonerty said his law would not prohibit employers from making requirements of employees that relate to the job. The employer could require that a worker be well groomed, but not that he or she be physically attractive.

A fat person couldn't be rejected for an office job based on his weight, but he could be turned down for a job where physical fitness is required — as a police officer, for instance.

Under the ordinance, a person who feels he has been discriminated against could take his case to a city-designated mediator. If the matter was not resolved there, the person could file a civil suit.

Coonerty's proposal will go to the City Council for discussion Jan. 14; a public hearing will be held Feb. 11.