

Latah County adds the four words

New employee handbook will reflect updated anti-discrimination section based on 'sexual orientation, gender identity'

Terri Harber/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

With little fanfare Monday morning, Latah County Commissioners approved changes to the county's employee handbook that included adding a reference in the anti-discrimination section to "sexual orientation, gender identity."

The phrase will be inserted alongside groups and conditions, such as race, religion, gender, age, disability and national origin, already mentioned in the county's document.

Deputy County Prosecutor Bradley Rudley said there wasn't a particular precipitating event that dictated the change, "but this was as good a time as any."

Discussion about making a change began early this year among county officials after the idea was presented by commissioners. Rudley worked on the language and said the change affects hiring and conduct, which includes treatment of the general public, not just how co-workers treat one another, he said.

The vote was 2-0 in favor of the change. Commissioner Dave McGraw wasn't at the meeting.

Moscow has had similar sex and gender anti-discrimination language in its employee documents for at least a decade, said Debbie Klein Robertson, Moscow's human resources director. The City Council extended the protections to all residents in 2013.

Another change in the handbook was made to bring policy in line with the Family and Medical Leave Act, which was affected by the National Defense Authorization Act. Employees who need to take leave to care for a close relative who is a member of the armed services - active duty or veteran - are allowed to take up to 26 weeks unpaid leave during a single 12-month period. Other forms of unpaid family leave are allowed for up to 12 weeks, Clerk-Auditor Henrienne Westberg said.

A new section of the handbook will also address the county's volunteer policy. Those who serve on county commissions and advisory groups compose most of this group. They will be subject to the rules of employee conduct and must sign liability release forms and confidentiality notices, Westberg said.

The changes became effective immediately after the commissioners gave their approval Monday morning.

Also noted in the handbook is the amount of money employees are paid in mileage reimbursement. The current 42 cents a mile will rise to 55.5 cents a mile once the 2016 Fiscal

Year begins on Oct 1. Westberg described the mileage reimbursement increase as having minimal financial impact to the county budget but that department spending plans created for 2016 FY would have to be slightly modified to reflect the change.

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