



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

MAYOR: Lauren McLean

Testimony of Mayor Lauren McLean Oppose HB 561: Restrictions on Municipal Flags Before Senate State Affairs Committee Friday, March 13, 2026

As the Mayor of the City of Boise, I stand before you today in opposition to HB 561. HB 561 represents an unprecedented expansion of state control over local decision making, complete disregard for democracy at the local level, and a fundamental misunderstanding of effective local governance.

Since 2016 the City of Boise has flown the Pride Flag as an official flag of the city. That means the flag has been an official part of the Boise flag display through two different mayors, the service of many different city council members, and all the municipal elections across the last decade. The flag has consistently drawn support from the citizens who live, work, and vote in Boise. And until the passage of HB 96 during the 2025 Legislative Session, the flag flew without any meaningful controversy and with widespread support. In fact, it can be said that any supposed "controversy" related to the Pride Flag has resulted from the 2025 legislation, this new bill, HB 561, and has primarily been driven by folks and media figures that do not live in Boise.

I ask this Committee to step back from these manufactured culture wars and consider why Boise made the Pride Flag an official flag of the city, why that aligns with our city values, and why this committee should reject HB 561.

The purpose in flying the flag is simple; it sends the message that the City of Boise has long maintained that our community is strongest when every resident – regardless of who they love or how they identify – feels safe, respected, and welcome. It is a vital symbol of our commitment to being a "City for Everyone." It reflects our municipal values of dignity and belonging.

For decades, LGBTQ Idahoans have been harassed, mocked, told explicitly and implicitly that they are not full citizens, and have been physically threatened and harmed. A city choosing to fly a Pride Flag is not an attack on anyone else. Recognizing a marginalized group does not diminish the majority. It does not provide new rights to the group and does not take any rights away from the majority.

First and foremost, respecting all citizens is the right thing to do under the United States Constitution. But it is also good for business. Boise competes nationally for talent, business conventions, entrepreneurs, medical professionals, engineers, and students. If the Legislature forces the City of Boise to take down an official, welcoming symbol that has stood for so long, the Legislature will be distorting the city message, indicating that in the State of Idaho not all citizens, businesses, potential employees, and students are welcome and respected. What is also troubling is that, in an effort to stop Boise from flying the Pride Flag, HB 561 was broadly drawn in a misguided attempt to perpetuate a charade that the bill is about more than Boise and the Pride Flag.

I have heard the false assertions that I, along with the Boise City Council, defied the law. That is false. In response to the passage of HB 96 during the 2025 Legislative Session, we consulted with both in-house and outside counsel and confirmed that we complied with the new law. We took the same actions we always take upon the conclusion of another legislative session. We review newly enacted laws and update policies, ordinances or enact resolutions to ensure compliance with the state law. That is exactly what the city did last April upon adjournment and we remain in compliance with Idaho Code 67-2303A. We have since maintained legal compliance with state law while also ensuring that our LGBTQ residents feel seen, respected, and safe in their own community – especially in light of continued, and targeted attacks.

Ultimately, I'm here before you in opposition to HB 561 because this bill is an unwarranted state overreach that undermines local control and targets specific marginalized groups. The power to determine which symbols reflect a community's unique identity and values should reside with the locally elected officials who are closest to the people. By stripping municipalities of the ability to designate their own official flags, this bill bypasses the democratic process at the local level.

Additionally, municipal governments should have the right to reflect their community's unique values without facing punitive financial retaliation from the state. By threatening the city with thousands of dollars in daily fines – in addition to an unfair, unequal fee shifting provisions benefiting only the attorney general, HB 561 attempts to silence dissent by making it economically unfeasible to challenge the faulty statute in court. These fines and the unequal fee shifting do not serve the public good; instead, they force a city to siphon critical taxpayer dollars away from essential services like police, fire, and parks in order to access the courts.

In closing, I ask you today to please prioritize empowering local governments to serve their residents, not micromanage the flagpoles of Idaho's hundreds of city halls. When the state dictates the minute details of municipal expression, it undermines the very principle of "small government" that Idahoans cherish. I urge this committee to respect the autonomy of Idaho's cities and vote "no" to hold HB 561 in committee.

