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Ballot measure would protect sexual orientation

by **Mary Jo Pitzl** - Apr. 4, 2008 06:08 PM
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A ballot measure filed Friday would make it illegal for employers to refuse to hire or promote someone based on sexual orientation, among other criteria.

But it's also being filed as a counterweight to any effort to put a constitutional ban on gay marriage on the November ballot, said the sponsor of Friday's filing.

"I'm guessing this might cause some consternation to the Center for Arizona Policy," state Rep. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Phoenix, said of her measure.

Sinema's hope is that by mobilizing a voter bloc that would turn out to ensure the workplace protections offered in the Free to Work ballot proposal, the center would retreat from its intent to continue to press for a constitutional ban on gay marriage.

On Thursday, Sinema helped engineer a strategy that derailed a legislative measure that would have referred the gay-marriage question to the November ballot.

Backers of the marriage ban indicated Friday they would press on in the face of the legislative defeat.

Sinema acknowledged that the ballot measure she filed Friday includes some job-discrimination protections already in state law, such as a prohibition against race-based discrimination. But other areas are left open.

"People who are gay in Arizona can be fired simply for being gay," she said.

To qualify for the ballot, Sinema and her supporters must gather the signatures of 153,365 registered voters by July 3. The campaign will use paid petition circulators, Sinema said.

Asked if she would drop her effort if there is no gay-marriage drive, Sinema said "it depends," noting that timing would play a role.