

ACTION ALERT: Urge Your Senators and Representative to Support the Equality Act!

August 11, 2015

TAKE ACTION - NOW has campaigned for many years for passage of a comprehensive bill prohibiting unequal treatment and we are excited to be supporting recently introduced legislation aimed at ensuring equal treatment for LGBTQIA people and women. The **Equality Act** -- which was introduced in both the House (H.R.3185) and) and Senate (S.1858) in late July – is a ground-breaking advance of civil rights protections not only for LGBTQIA persons, but also fills many loopholes in civil rights and other laws to better protect women from discriminatory treatment.

Many States Still Permit Discrimination - The Equality Act is needed because 31 states do not have fully-inclusive non-discrimination laws to protect LGBTQIA people. Many states still permit discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodation and education.

Amending the Civil Rights Act – The Equality Act would amend several titles of the **Civil Rights Act of 1964** to include language that protects persons from discrimination in the context of employment, housing, credit, education, and jury service based on their perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender identity. The definition of public accommodations is broadened to cover stores, online retailers and service providers, banks, salons, etc. to extend the discrimination prohibitions. Additionally, discrimination against LGBT persons in educational programs receiving federal funds would be prohibited. (For more details on how other federal laws would be amended, see the NOW Issue Advisory on the Equality Act at <http://now.org/resource/issue-advisory-equality-act-would-ensure-equal-treatment-for-lgbtqia-persons-and-women/>)

Expanding Protections for Women – Current laws prohibiting discrimination by businesses serving the public and all types of programs receiving federal funds do not have prohibitions against sex discrimination. The Equality Act adds protections for women against sexual harassment in public accommodations, including buses and subways. Gender-based discriminatory treatment in refusing service or being charged more for goods and services (as often happens with car mechanics, car dealerships or contractors) would be prohibited. The Equality Act would give women new avenues of legal recourse and new options if they are sexually harassed or experience discriminatory treatment in these areas.

Protecting Reproductive Health - Importantly, the Equality Act would prevent pharmacies from refusing to make available contraceptives – as many still do. It would provide for legal action against pharmacies that refuse to dispense birth control, a problem thousands still face. Additionally, this bill would prohibit the harassment of mothers who are still being asked to leave many public places because they are breast-feeding.

Prohibiting Religious Belief-Based Discrimination – Currently, multiple efforts to deny equal treatment for LGBTQIA persons are being made in states under either the federal or the state.

Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA) laws. The Equality Act includes a clear prohibition against the use of religious belief to engage in discrimination against LGBT persons. The Act makes explicit that businesses covered by federal civil rights law would not be able to use the RFRA to discriminate.

Call, e-mail, or schedule a meeting with your representative and senators and ask them to co-sponsor, support, and vote for the Equality Act. The main number for Congress is (202) 225-3131 and a directory of House member's office numbers is available at <http://www.house.gov/representatives/> A directory of Senate member's office numbers is available at <http://www.senate.gov/senators/>

YOUR MESSAGE:

Dear Member of Congress:

The Equality Act will provide critical federal protections for LGBTQIA people and women who continue to face widespread discrimination in their everyday lives. I believe that it is time that LGBTQIA people and women are fully protected against harassment, unequal treatment, and discrimination. The **Equality Act** (S. 1858/ H.R. 3185) would:

- Protect LGBTQIA people from discrimination in employment, housing, credit, and jury service based on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Protect LGBTQIA people and women from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender in stores, online retailers or service providers, banks, salons as well as in public accommodations such as buses, subways, or taxis.
- Protect LGBTQIA people from discrimination in any program receiving federal funding, especially at any public school, college and university.
- Protect women from sexual harassment in public accommodations, giving them avenues of legal recourse or new options if they are sexually-harassed or experience discrimination.
- Prevent pharmacies from refusing to provide contraceptives as many currently do and prohibit the harassment of mothers who are still being asked to leave public places while they are breast feeding.

Please support the comprehensive **Equality Act** by signing on as a co-sponsor – if you have not done so already – and take action to move this important legislation forward. Sponsors include Reps. David Cicilline (D-R.I) and John Lewis (D-Ga.), with Sens. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) and Corey Booker (D- N.J.) I thank you for your attention and look forward to hearing from you concerning your actions to support the Equality Act.

Sincerely,