

May 15, 2019

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of the fifteen undersigned national Jewish organizations, we write to express our support for the Equality Act (H.R. 5). Driven by our Jewish values, we are committed to supporting laws that protect the civil rights and individual liberties of all people. The Equality Act is a significant step forward for the LGBTQ community, and we urge Congress to swiftly pass this important bill.

Our Jewish values necessitate that we support full equality for the LGBTQ community. Jewish tradition teaches that all people are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the Divine image, and are worthy of dignity and respect. As organizations grounded in Jewish values, we have an ethical and moral responsibility to fight for a society that ensures the humanity of all people. Every person is entitled to live without fear of persecution, harassment, and discrimination – regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. For centuries, Judaism has recognized a diverse spectrum of sex and gender identities. Across Jewish legal codes and rabbinic commentary, there are hundreds of references to at least six different genders.<sup>1</sup> Many of our texts proudly affirm the existence of transgender, intersex, and genderfluid individuals. We know that these identities, and those of the entire LGBTQ community, are valid.

Indeed, support for LGBTQ nondiscrimination protections extends across the faith community, and throughout the country. A majority of all faith groups – including 80 percent of Jews, 71 percent of white mainline Protestants, and 54 percent of white evangelical Protestants – support laws that protect LGBTQ people from discrimination in jobs, public accommodations, and housing.<sup>2</sup> This view is shared by nearly seven in ten Americans – including a majority of people in every state and every political party.<sup>3</sup>

Despite significant progress since the signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the LGBTQ community still faces discrimination in many areas of daily life. There is no federal law that explicitly provides anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people, and over 30 states still similarly lack such explicit nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ individuals.<sup>4</sup> The Equality Act will address many areas of life where the LGBTQ community still faces discrimination (including employment, housing, education, public accommodations, federally-funded programs, credit, and jury selection) by amending existing federal civil rights laws to include explicit and consistent nondiscrimination protections for sexual orientation and gender identity. This law will grant the same protections to LGBTQ people that are currently provided to other protected classes.

Beyond the LGBTQ community, the Equality Act would prohibit sex-based discrimination in public accommodations and federally funded programs, providing critical protections for women. The bill will also expand the definition of public accommodations in Title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to more closely align with definitions in the Americans with Disabilities Act and many state laws, thereby strengthening nondiscrimination protections for all people.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.transtorah.org/PDFs/Classical Jewish Terms for Gender Diversity.pdf](http://www.transtorah.org/PDFs/Classical_Jewish_Terms_for_Gender_Diversity.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.prii.org/research/americans-support-protections-lgbt-people/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/non\\_discrimination\\_laws](http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/non_discrimination_laws)

The need for comprehensive protections for the LGBTQ community is clear. In 2017, a majority of LGBTQ people reported that they or an LGBTQ family member or friend experienced discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>5</sup> According to the most recent FBI hate crime statistics, there were 1,130 hate crimes based on sexual orientation in 2017 (a five percent increase since 2016) as well as 119 crimes based on gender identity, including 106 targeting transgender people.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the Human Rights Campaign 2018 Healthcare Equality Index reports that 70 percent of transgender and gender non-conforming patients and 56 percent of lesbian, gay, and bisexual patients surveyed experienced some sort of discrimination in health care.<sup>7</sup> LGBTQ youth are especially vulnerable, with nearly eighty percent of LGBTQ students experiencing verbal harassment due to their sexual orientation and over 50 percent experiencing harassment due to their gender identity or expression. LGBTQ people of color, immigrants, and those with disabilities face even greater barriers and biases.

Although many federal courts have ruled that anti-LGBTQ discrimination is a form of sex discrimination that violates federal law, the current administration is actively working to overturn these rulings and redefine federal sex discrimination through regulation. In the face of these attacks, Congress must make these protections permanent. The Equality Act would clarify what many courts have ruled: that sex under Title VII covers sexual orientation and gender identity.

As Jewish organizations, we believe firmly that all people deserve to live free from fear and discrimination, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. We urge Congress to pass the Equality Act.

Sincerely,

American Conference of Cantors  
Anti-Defamation League  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action  
Central Conference of American Rabbis  
Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action  
Jewish Women International  
Keshet  
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger  
Men of Reform Judaism  
National Council of Jewish Women  
Rabbinical Assembly  
Reconstructing Judaism  
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association  
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights  
Union for Reform Judaism

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/press-releases/poll-lgbtq-americans-discrimination/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2017/topic-pages/incidents-and-offenses>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.hrc.org/hei>