



## NEED FOR THE EQUALITY ACT

H.R. 3185; S. 1858

Despite significant steps forward, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Americans lack basic legal protections in states across the country. The patchwork nature of current laws leaves millions of people subject to uncertainty and potential discrimination that impacts their safety, their family, and their very way of life.

Our nation's civil rights laws protect people on the basis of race, color, national origin, and in most cases, sex, disability, and religion. But federal law does not provide consistent non-discrimination protections based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The need for these protections is clear – nearly two-thirds of LGBT Americans report having experienced discrimination in their personal lives.

Everyone should have a fair chance to earn a living and provide a home for their families without fear of constant harassment or discrimination.

*(Source: Human Rights Campaign)*

## THE EQUALITY ACT

The Equality Act would provide consistent and explicit anti-discrimination protections for LGBT people across key areas of life, including employment, housing, credit, education, public spaces and services, federally funded programs, and jury service.

The Equality Act would amend existing civil rights law – including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Fair Housing Act, the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, the Jury Selection and Services Act, and several laws regarding employment with the federal government – to include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected characteristics. The legislation also amends the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination in public spaces and services and federally funded programs on the basis of sex.

Additionally, the Equality Act would update the public spaces and services covered in current law to include retail stores, services such as banks and legal services, and transportation services. These important updates would strengthen existing protections for everyone.

Decades of civil rights history shows that civil rights laws are effective in decreasing discrimination because they provide strong federal remedies targeted to specific vulnerable groups. By explicitly including sexual orientation and gender identity in these fundamental laws, LGBT people will finally be afforded the exact same protections as other covered groups under federal law.

## CURRENT STATUS

The Equality Act was introduced in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress on July 23, 2015, by Senators Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), and Cory Booker (D-NJ), as well as Representative David Cicilline (D-RI). The bill was launched with over 200 original cosponsors – the most congressional support that any piece of pro-LGBT legislation has received upon introduction.

