



Making Change Happen

We believe in social change. We keep fighting for equality because we have seen so much achieved for LGBT people and people with HIV. Some days, the change around us seems so remarkable, it takes my breath away. Some days it comes far too slowly and we dig in and push harder.

Doors are beginning to open for discussion of LGBT and HIV rights in our nation's capital. I have had productive meetings in recent months at the White House and the Department of Justice during which we discussed issues ranging from marriage equality and repeal of DOMA to "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and passage of an inclusive Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA). Real progress has already been made in publishing proposed rules to finally lift the travel ban on people with HIV and in reinforcing the law that prohibits discrimination against people with HIV who are seeking licenses in certain professions.

We need a strong, inclusive federal law that protects all LGBT people from employment discrimination, no matter where they live. This is a change in the law that has not come fast enough. Wisconsin passed the first state law prohibiting job discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in 1982 — more than 25 years ago. But only 21 states and the District of Columbia have statewide laws expressly prohibiting such discrimination and only 12 of those states prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression. Lambda Legal's attorneys need stronger laws to fight for LGBT people in every state when they are denied a job or fired because of prejudice.

This year we all have a very good chance to make this change happen. Rep. Barney Frank and 152 co-sponsors introduced a trans-inclusive ENDA in June. Year after year, we spoke out, stood firm and fought for an inclusive ENDA. Now we have a congress and a president who support equality in the workplace. Congress will soon hold hearings. We can't wait patiently for change to come: We have to keep fighting to see ENDA enacted into law.

Meanwhile, Lambda Legal keeps fighting for workplace fairness. For example, when Vandy Beth Glenn was fired from her job as a legislative editor by the Georgia state legislature after she informed them that she was transitioning from male to female, we agreed to represent her as she fought back. A federal judge in Georgia has now ruled that Glenn should have her day in court, making clear that the "...anticipated reactions of others are not a sufficient basis for discrimination."

And in 2007, when three public safety employees in Bellevue, WA — including two firefighters and a 911 dispatcher — were told that they would not get all the same benefits as the non-gay employees with whom they worked side-by-side, Lambda Legal helped them fight back, too. We filed suit against the city seeking equal family benefits as a basic issue of fairness, and soon thereafter, they changed their policy to provide equal benefits to gay and lesbian employees.

Change was the inspiring theme of the last election. But social change doesn't just happen — people must fight for it. We and our allies must continue examining our hearts and our minds and voice a strong commitment to equality for everyone in our communities — lesbian, gay, bisexual, same-gender loving, transgender, intersex, living with HIV; though we may identify differently, we are linked by a movement. Lambda Legal and many partners and friends across the country have not gotten results by waiting for change — we go out and make it.

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