



Equality Pennsylvania

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Pennsylvania House and Senate members partner with Equality PA to form LGBT Equality Caucus

Harrisburg – For the first time, members of the state House and Senate have formed an LGBT Equality Caucus. The idea to create a caucus was suggested to a number of members early in 2011 by Equality Pennsylvania. From this discussion, a partnership was launched and the Caucus was created as a result. It is the first caucus of its kind dedicated solely to educating legislators on the lives and challenges facing Pennsylvania's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) citizens as well as being a voice on equality issues within the legislature.

More than 20 members of the caucus have agreed to support a comprehensive mission statement: "The mission of the Pennsylvania LGBT Equality Caucus is to promote lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) equality. The bi-partisan LGBT Equality Caucus will be comprised of Members of the General Assembly who are strongly committed to achieving the full enjoyment of human rights for LGBT people in the Commonwealth and around the nation. By serving as a resource for Members of the General Assembly, their staff, and the public on LGBT issues, the Caucus will work toward the extension of equal rights, the repeal of discriminatory laws, the elimination of hate-motivated violence, and the improved health and well-being for all regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression."

Caucus co-chair Rep. Dan Frankel, D-Allegheny, said, "We know that a solid majority of Pennsylvanians support changing state law to make it more fair and equal on several issues. For example, we have seen around 70 percent constant support over the past eight years for legislation to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity or expression in employment, housing, credit and public accommodations. I want this caucus to help the legislature be as forward-looking on these issues as the people we represent. Equality Pennsylvania deserves thanks for suggesting the idea of this caucus and working with legislators to help make it happen."

Co-chair Sen. Daylin Leach, D-Montgomery, said, "I've been working to legalize marriage equality in Pennsylvania for quite some time, and I am eager to work with my colleagues in the LGBT Equality Caucus and bring those efforts to fruition. We need to end the unjust and hurtful discrimination under current state law that denies same sex couples the benefits we offer married couples. I am hopeful that by standing together, united in our common cause, the members of the Caucus will dissolve all of the barriers to building families that gay and lesbian couples currently face."

Rep. Babette Josephs, D-Phila., another longtime advocate for LGBT Pennsylvanians, said, "I am honored to be chosen to be a co-convenor of this Caucus. No longer will members of the LGBT community be treated as second class citizens. I want their families to be valued just as more traditional ones are; that means inheritance tax will be forgiven; hospital visitation allowed, and contracts between loving partners will be honored. My ultimate goal is to make same sex marriage as valid and respected as different sex unions. We cannot call ourselves a civilized society if we do not do at least that."

"We are so pleased and honored that so many members worked with us to form a Caucus. It is a very positive step and possibly even a game changer," said Equality PA Executive Director Ted Martin. "For far too long, the state's LGBT community has looked at Harrisburg as the place where their rights were routinely ignored or worse, where their lives become a convenient political football batted about to score points in tight campaigns. Our hope is that the Caucus will begin to change all that by educating members and providing a balanced point of view to those who use misinformation and sometimes hateful speech to move their own agenda. We think the Caucus can help to change the tone of discussion and can give members a real view of how LGBT people live and are affected daily by discrimination in everything from employment and housing, to inheritance rights and of course, relationships."

Members of the new caucus are: Frankel, Josephs and Reps. Shapiro, B. Boyle, K. Boyle, Brennan, Payton, Davis, McGeehan, Bradford, Brown, Briggs, Buxton, Cohen, DeLissio, Curry, DePasquale, M. O'Brien, Gerber, Roebuck, M. Smith, Santarsiero, Sturla and Sens. Leach, Ferlo and Farnese.

"This action by members of the General Assembly to form an LGBT Equality Caucus mirrors the consistent viewpoints of a majority of Pennsylvanians who agree that providing basic civil rights is not a controversial issue," said Equality PA President Adrian Shanker. I am hopeful that this caucus will be successful in advancing our rights in the state level next year in the same way so many towns and cities across Pennsylvania have done on the local level this year."

Andy Hoover, legislative director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania, said, "As important as it is for the LGBT community and its allies to lobby the legislature, it's also important for the community to know that someone at the capitol has its back. The ACLU of Pennsylvania applauds all of the members of the LGBT Equality Caucus for their willingness to stand up for equal rights."

Equality Pennsylvania is the statewide voice for LGBT Equality in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and works collaboratively to establish a comprehensive network of individuals and organizations united in securing equal rights for the LGBT community. For more information: www.equalitypa.org.

Equality Pennsylvania is a proud member of the Equality Federation.

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