



Equality Pennsylvania

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Equality Pennsylvania Celebrates Passage of State's Milestone 25th Non-Discrimination Ordinance

Harrisburg – Today Equality Pennsylvania (EQPA) is celebrating the passage of the state's 25th local LGBT-inclusive non-discrimination ordinance in Jenkintown Borough (Montgomery County). Pennsylvania's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens have no protection in state law against discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations if it is based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. With little action to change this sad fact being taken in Harrisburg, many communities have turned to EQPA for help in passing local ordinances to address this inequity.

“How Jenkintown Borough's non-discrimination ordinance came to be is a nearly identical story to what has happened in other communities we have worked with on this issue,” explained EQPA Executive Director Ted Martin. “Much of our work is to educate the public on the lives of the state's LGBT citizens. When people --- LGBT and allies alike --- learn that it is still perfectly legal in Pennsylvania to fire someone for being LGBT or deny them a public accommodation like a hotel room or evict them from their apartment, they are generally pretty appalled. That's what happened in Jenkintown. Community members learned this information and they reached out to us for help to change it. They knew that we could provide resources and information, and with the General Assembly largely ignoring the issue, that our strategy to pass local ordinances was their best option to make real change for the better.”

Over the past year, EQPA has helped to pass ordinances in Doylestown Borough; Lower Merion Township; Haverford Township; The City of Bethlehem; Springfield Township; Newtown Borough; Whitmarsh Township and most recently, Jenkintown Borough.

“We are really just doing what state legislators have told us to do all along on non-discrimination,” Martin commented. “Pass local ordinances and that will build grassroots pressure on us to act they say. So we have made passing ordinances a top priority and we wanted 25 on the books by 2012. Obviously hard work has paid off since we met our goal, but we are hardly stopping here. We continue to work with over a dozen other communities throughout the state and we are getting more calls on this subject than you can imagine.”

Equality Pennsylvania President, Adrian Shanker, who led the effort to pass a non-discrimination ordinance in the City of Bethlehem earlier this year, attributes the growing interest in ordinances to the public being out in front of their elected officials on this issue. “The reality is that Pennsylvanians support basic non-discrimination laws that protect the LGBT community. Public opinion, followed by a renewed political will among progressive elected officials, has caused now to be the best time to expand equality for the LGBT community. Unfortunately, our state legislature is still shirking their responsibility to protect all their citizens from discrimination,” Shanker noted.

In April 2011 EQPA released polling showing strong statewide support for passing LGBT-inclusive non-discrimination legislation. The poll showed that by a more than 2:1 margin (or 69% to 24%), Pennsylvanians support passage of legislation banning discrimination against individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression on matters dealing with the workplace, public housing and public accommodations; 6% of voters said they are undecided.

“The polling results show not only the basic fairness of Pennsylvanians, but their comfort with LGBT people having basic protections, and their consistency as well,” Shanker concluded. “This is the third poll in a row that we have commissioned showing very strong support for this type of legislation. In 2003, the results were 67% in favor, in 2007 it was 70% in favor and today the number is 69%. Not only have Pennsylvanians never wavered in their view that this discrimination is wrong, they have stayed fiercely loyal to that point. If public opinion was corporate brand loyalty, LGBT equality would be a Fortune 500. Knowing how people really feel on the subject empowers us to continue pressing our legislators about the need for a statewide law.”

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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