

March 27th, 2019

The Honorable Jerry Nadler
Chairman of the Judiciary Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Nadler and Ranking Member Doug Collins:

The American Association for Access, Equity, and Diversity (AAAED) formally submits our letter of support for the passage of the Equality Act, H.R.5. We ask that this letter be placed into the *Congressional Record*.

The LGBTQ+ community, like all other communities, deserves to be treated with dignity and respect - free from discrimination. Areas such as housing, employment, public accommodation, education, and credit should not be exclusive of Americans due to their sexual orientation and gender identity. We believe that the Equality Act, when enacted, will go a long way to achieving that goal.

Founded in 1974, the AAAED is a 501c(6) member organization, is the longest-serving association of professionals in the equal opportunity profession. AAAED is a leader in equal opportunity, affirmative action and diversity training and advocacy in higher education, private industry, and government. The association has four decades of success promoting affirmative action and other equal opportunity related compliance laws to enhance the tenets of access and equality in employment, economic and educational opportunities. At the AAAED, we believe in affirming equal access for all Americans regardless of age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion or disability. The AAAED strongly supports the LGBTQ+ community and advocates on behalf of their rights in employment and higher education.

In 2009, President Obama issued an Executive Order to prevent federal agencies from discriminating against same-sex partners, providing them marriage benefits and freedom from being fired for their sexual orientation.¹ In 2010, President Obama prevented funds from going to hospitals that discriminated against LGBTQ families and partners.² To solidify the support for LGBTQ+ Americans, President Obama issued an executive order in 2014 to prevent federal contractors from discriminating against LGBTQ people due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.³ However, as you know, these protections are not stationary and executive orders can be removed by any future president who has contrary views. Thus, Congress must enact the Equality Act to ensure that, like all Americans, members of the LGBTQ+ community are protected and secure in all aspects of their lives.⁴

¹ Barack Obama, "Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies on Federal Benefits and Non-Discrimination, 6-17-09," The White House, June 17, 2009, 1-3.

² "Obama Administration Advancements on Behalf of LGBTQ Americans | Human Rights Campaign," Human Rights Campaign.

³ "LGBT Issues | American Association for Access Equity and Diversity." AAAED, American Association for Access, Equity and Diversity, 2019, www.aaaed.org/aaaed/LGBT_Issues1.asp.

⁴ For more information on this topic, see our LEAD Fund Author article, "LGBTQA+ Rights & Obama Strobe, Dakota. *LEAD Fund*, Fund for Leadership, Equity, Access and Diversity, 2017, www.aaaed.org/images/aaaed/Press_Releases/LEAD-Fund-Authors-FINAL-121417.pdf.

The ACLU found that 31 states do not have workplace discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people.⁵ This means that our LGBTQ+ members can be fired from their jobs for no reason other than who they love. Interestingly, the Public Religion Research Institute found in a 2016 national survey that 70% of Americans support LGBTQ+ non-discrimination legislation like the Equality Act.⁶ Yet, as a nation, we continue to fail our fellow Americans.

While the AAAED and its member institutions provide numerous resources to assist our LGBTQ+ members find support in higher education, employment, and other matters, we do not have the ability to prevent rejection by their employer, their baker, or their landlord. Moreover, LGBTQ+ people are not protected in housing, higher education, public accommodations, or credit despite the fact that there is an overwhelming amount of public and bipartisan support.

We at the American Association for Access, Equity and Diversity strongly urge members of this committee to support the Equality Act. With both public and congressional support, it is time to finally pass this law and legally protect LGBTQ+ Americans.

Thank you for your continued support for the principle of access, equity and diversity for all.

Respectfully,

Shirley J. Wilcher, MA, JD, CAAP
Executive Director American Association for Access Equity and Diversity (AAAED)

⁵ "LGBT Rights." *ACLU*, American Civil Liberties Union, 2019, www.aclu.org/issues/lgbt-rights.

⁶ Gohl, Cody. "70% Of Americans Support LGBT Anti-Discrimination Laws." *LOGO News*, Viacom International Inc, 19 Feb. 2016, www.newnownext.com/70-of-americans-support-lgbt-non-discrimination-laws/02/2016/.