

Prepared Testimony of Representative Mark Takano (CA-39)
Judiciary Committee Member Day Hearing
Friday, November 3, 2023

Thank you for allowing me to submit my testimony.

I am here today to speak on H.R. 15, the Equality Act, a landmark civil rights bill to ensure that all LGBTQ+ Americans can enjoy their basic human rights no matter where they live, work, or go to school.

It is an honor to be leading this bill, and I take the responsibility of this critical legislation seriously. I sit here today not only because of the countless hours that advocates and legislators spent drafting this legislation, but also because of the pioneers upon whose shoulders I stand.

I grew up watching legislators in California host TV debates on whether gays and lesbians should be allowed to teach in public schools – just a few years before I myself became a teacher. **When I ran my second campaign for Congress, I was publicly outed by my opponent and made the target of homophobic attack ads.**

We've come a long way since then, and the progress towards equality that we've made is the result of battles fought over the course of decades—but we still have a long way to go.

It is 2023. We are two decades into the 21st century, and still there are **still no federal protections** for LGBTQ+ Americans on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. A majority of states do not explicitly protect LGBTQ+ people from discrimination, **meaning that your rights and protections depend on the zip code you live in.**

Under current law, individuals and families can be discriminated against with impunity **in most American states.** Although polls show that the majority of Americans across both parties support nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people, Congress has yet to catch up.

The House has now passed the Equality Act twice with bipartisan support, and I—alongside the co-chairs of the Equality Caucus and Senator Jeff Merkley—reintroduced this bill in June with the **cosponsorship of every member of the House Democratic Caucus.**

Crafted with the input of dozens of respected advocacy and civil rights groups, the Equality Act has the endorsement of over 640 organizations and more than 500 businesses.

The concept of the bill is simple: the legislation amends the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other existing laws to explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics in seven key areas of life: **employment, housing, education, credit, public accommodations, federally funded programs, and jury selection.**

There has never been a more critical moment to support equal protections under the law. In the past eleven months alone, over 520 bills have been introduced in state legislatures that attack the humanity of LGBTQ+ individuals and seek to strip them of their basic rights, **including several in this House.** In that time, more than 84 anti-equality bills have been signed into law at the state level, including measures to restrict access to gender-affirming care, censor LGBTQ+ topics in the classroom, and ban transgender young people from participating in athletics, among other extreme measures.

Every day, American families experience what it means to have your civil and human rights vanish with the stroke of a pen. With the passage of these state laws, parents are making excruciating choices in order to protect their children—including leaving their jobs, school districts, homes, families, and communities just to ensure that their kids can access basic resources. And it's not just children that are being impacted

by these restrictions—adults are seeing their access to healthcare restricted and are forced to upend their lives just to survive.

Mister Chair, this bill is about equal access to the freedoms that all people are entitled to. The freedom of all Americans to live where they want and still access their basic needs; the freedom to go to school or to work without fear; the freedom to buy a home, get credit, and patronize businesses without having to second-guess whether they could be turned away.

It is my belief that all people are entitled to the fruits of democracy: equality and justice for all. That the idea of America – an imperfect country still full of promise – is worth fighting for. The Equality Act takes one more stride towards that promise.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill and hope that we can work together to advance what is right for all Americans.