

## Pennsylvania House Approves Bill Banning Discrimination Against Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity



In a significant move towards equality and inclusivity, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives passed House Bill 300, also known as the Fairness Act, on Tuesday. The bill aims to amend the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act, which currently prohibits discrimination based on race, religion, ancestry, age, and national origin in employment and housing. If enacted into law, the Fairness Act would extend these protections to include sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression.

The bill's co-sponsors highlighted the importance of this legislation in a memo, where they referred to the landmark 2020 decision of the United States Supreme Court in *Bostock v. Clayton County*. In that ruling, the Court affirmed that employers cannot discriminate against individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, despite this historic victory for civil rights, individuals in Pennsylvania who identify as LGBTQ+ can still face discrimination in areas such as housing, education, and public accommodations solely based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

State Representative Dan Frankel, a co-sponsor of the bill, encouraged citizens to support the legislation by contacting their representatives prior to the vote. Frankel emphasized the significance of this moment, presenting it as an opportunity to rectify past injustices. He drew attention to a bill passed 24 years ago that prohibited universities from offering benefits to same-sex partners, highlighting the missed chances to provide crucial protections to LGBTQ+ citizens in Pennsylvania. Frankel stated that while they couldn't change the outcome of that vote or several subsequent ones, they could choose to do the right thing now. He emphasized that LGBTQ+ individuals continue to live in fear of discrimination on a daily basis, and this situation should not be acceptable to anyone.

The bill successfully passed in the House with a vote of 102 to 98. However, the journey towards becoming law is not yet complete. The Pennsylvania Senate will now consider the Fairness Act and opposition to the bill is anticipated.

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The advancement of LGBTQ+ rights has been a topic of both progress and backlash globally. Coinciding with the Pennsylvania House's decision, the Supreme Court of Nepal ordered the government to recognize same-sex marriage, marking a significant milestone for LGBTQ+ rights in the country. On the other hand, the Parliament of Uganda recently passed a strict anti-homosexuality law that includes severe punishments, even up to death. These examples underscore the ongoing struggle for equal rights and the importance of legislative efforts to protect the rights and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals.

The passage of the Fairness Act in the Pennsylvania House represents a significant step forward in the fight against discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity. By expanding the protections offered by the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act, this bill aims to create a more inclusive and accepting society for all residents of the state. The progress made in Pennsylvania inspires other states and jurisdictions to reevaluate their anti-discrimination laws and ensure that the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals are safeguarded.

As the Fairness Act moves to the Pennsylvania Senate, its supporters remain hopeful for its success. By continuing to raise awareness and rally support, advocates for equality aim to secure the passage of this crucial legislation, thereby making Pennsylvania a beacon of progress in the ongoing fight for LGBTQ+ rights.