June 8, 2017

The Honorable David N. Cicilline
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Cicilline:

On behalf of the 117,500 members and affiliates of the American Psychological Association (APA), I am writing to thank you for your introduction of H.R. 2282, the Equality Act. This vital legislation would prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender identity, sexual orientation, and sex, consistent with the principles embodied in The Declaration of Independence that all are created equal under law. APA fully supports the Equality Act based on our 40-year history of supporting LGBT rights.

APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world’s largest association of psychologists. We have a longstanding commitment to ending discriminatory practices based on sex, sexual orientation and gender identity. In, 2007 APA adopted a resolution on “Opposing Discriminatory Legislation and Initiatives Aimed at Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Persons”, and in 2008 a policy statement on “Transgender, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression Non-Discrimination.” In these documents, APA explains the psychological research leading to our opposition to discrimination against the LGBT community.

The Equality Act would expand the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity at work, in places of public accommodation, housing, credit, education, jury service, and in programs and facilities that receive federal funding. It would protect people who associate with LGBT individuals (such as their children) from discrimination, and would extend provisions banning sex-based discrimination to public accommodations. Additionally, the Equality Act expands the facilities termed public accommodations, ensuring comprehensive non-discrimination protections in all areas of society.

The Equality Act is necessary because discrimination based on sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation remains a grave problem across the United States. For example:

- Individuals are often charged differently for the same service or product based on their actual or perceived sex.¹
- A national report prepared for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development found that same-sex couples experienced more discrimination in locating housing rentals than opposite-sex couples.²
- The vast majority of LGBT students experience harassment and/or abuse at school based on their sexual orientation, including verbal harassment (71%), physical harassment (27%), and physical assault (13%). Such victimization is associated with missed days of...
school, lower GPAs, lower self-esteem, and increased depression. Most LGBT students (82%) also report that they have encountered school policies that discriminate against sexual minorities.\(^\text{iii}\)

- Many older LGBT adults have significant social service, health, and long-term care needs, but are reluctant to access services due to experienced and perceived discrimination on the part of providers. \(^\text{iv}\)
- Eighty percent of transgender individuals who had held a job in the past year reported either experiencing some form of discrimination (e.g. harassment, being fired or denied a promotion) and/or taking steps to avoid discrimination at work (e.g. hiding gender identity). Compared to national averages, they were three times as likely to be unemployed and twice as likely to live in poverty. \(^\text{v}\)

Sexual and gender minorities already experience significant health and behavioral health disparities, due in part to social stigma and discrimination. Stress associated with stigma and discrimination may negatively impact the health and wellbeing of people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. \(^\text{vi, vii}\) Further, an atmosphere of intolerance can legitimize other forms of prejudice and discrimination, \(^\text{viii}\) including hate crimes and violence. For example, 20% of single-bias hate crimes in 2015 were based on the victim’s sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity. \(^\text{ix}\) In contrast, LGBT individuals living in states with policies protecting sexual minorities against workplace discrimination and hate crimes reported lower rates of psychological disorders. \(^\text{x}\)

Research indicates that people who accept and integrate their sexual orientation and gender identity into their personal identities are better psychologically adjusted than those who do not. \(^\text{xi, xii}\) Self-acceptance is facilitated by creating a society where people can live openly without fear of discrimination. \(^\text{xiii, xiv}\) This openness can also have broader societal impacts: psychological research has consistently found that heterosexuals who have interpersonal contact with LGBT individuals have more positive attitudes towards LGBT people as a group. \(^\text{xv}\)

Thank you once again for your efforts to end discrimination against LGBT individuals, their families, and the community at large by introducing H.R. 2282. If we can provide any assistance in furthering its passage, please contact Gabriel Twose, Ph.D., in our Public Interest Government Relations Office at 202-336-6104 or gtwose@apa.org.

Sincerely,

Clinton W. Anderson, Ph.D.
Interim Executive Director
Public Interest Directorate


