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LOBBY DAY: SUCCESS & RESULTS!



Within hours of the largest Lobby Day in Equality Texas history, we were already witnessing the positive results of citizen advocacy. On March 2, 2009, over four hundred (400) Texans who support the elimination of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression had face-to-face conversations with legislators and their staffs about issues of equality and the effect of public policy on daily lives. An additional 800 e-mails of support were generated via Equality Texas' Virtual Lobby Day from constituents who were unable to travel to the State Capitol.

"We gathered at the Capitol because we value the independent spirit of all to make their way in the world - to be given every chance to take advantage of the opportunities afforded us without discrimination," said Paul Scott, Equality Texas executive director. "We gathered in unprecedented numbers in response to a call that has gone out across Texas and the country - a call that more and more Texans are answering - the call for each and every one of us to be treated with dignity and respect."

Lobby Day participants represented constituents from 85 House Districts across the state. They included Texans from the major metropolitan areas of Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, Austin and San Antonio, as well as constituents from across the state including Abilene, Amarillo, Tyler, Huntsville, Bryan/College Station, Killeen, Waco, Corpus Christi, Pharr, McAllen, and more.

By the end of the day on March 2nd, the bills in Equality Texas' legislative agenda had picked up two (2) additional joint authors, four (4) co-authors, and a hate crimes study bill had been scheduled for a public hearing.

In the two weeks since Lobby Day, the pace has continued unabated and progress on advancing the legislative agenda has continued. For the latest on legislative happenings, read the next item in this e-newsletter.

Equality Texas wishes to thank our partnering organizations, who directly contributed to the record attendance and positive outcomes: Atticus Circle, Collin County Gay & Lesbian Alliance, HATCH, Human Rights Campaign, Join the Impact-Austin, Lambda Legal, Log Cabin Republicans-Dallas, MCC Austin at Freedom Oaks, Montrose Counseling Center, National Association of Social Workers/Texas, North Texas GLBT Chamber, Out Youth, PFLAG (National, Austin, Bryan/College Station, Fort Worth, and Houston), Resource Center of Dallas, Stonewall Democrats (Texas, Dallas, San Antonio, and Tarrant County), Transgender Education Network of Texas, Texas GSA Network, Youth First Texas, and University Democrats.



To view additional photos from Lobby Day, please visit [Equality Texas on Flickr](#).

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

This past Friday, March 13th, was the deadline for the filing of proposed legislation in both the Texas Senate and the House of Representatives. **We are pleased to report that no legislation was filed that specifically seeks to discriminate against Texans based on sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.** While no bills were filed which force us into a defensive posture, we will continue to be alert for any floor amendments that could have negative consequences.

On the proactive side, Equality Texas Legislative Agenda includes sixteen (16) pieces of pro-equality legislation. The bills are listed numerically by bill number, together with a brief description. Hyperlinks will take the reader to additional information on each bill in [Equality Texas Legislative](#)

Information Center.

- [Senate Bill 2216 by Ellis - Insurance Nondiscrimination](#)
- [House Bill 197 by Alonzo - Insurance Nondiscrimination](#)
- [House Bill 353 by Rodriguez - Hospital Visitation & Medical Decision Making](#)
- [House Bill 538 by Villarreal - Freedom from Workplace Discrimination Act](#)
- [House Bill 616 by Veasey - Hate Crimes Study](#)
- [House Bill 861 by Naishtat - Competitive Insurance Benefits \(CIB\)](#)
- [House Bill 1323 by Strama - Reporting Standards for Incidents of Bullying & Harrasment](#)
- [House Bill 1455 by D. Howard - Right to Decide Act \(Medical Decisions\)](#)
- [House Bill 2080 by Anchia - Birth Certificate of an Adopted Child](#)
- [House Bill 2215 by Farrar - Housing & Public Accommodation Nondiscrimination](#)
- [House Bill 2923 by Farrar - Student Nondiscrimination](#)
- [House Bill 2966 by Coleman - Addition of Gender Identity/Expression to Hate Crimes Act](#)
- [House Bill 3026 by Coleman - Repeal of the Unconstitutional "Homosexual Conduct Law"](#)
- [House Bill 3746 by Coleman - Safe Schools Bill](#)
- [House Bill 4297 by Coleman - Gender Marker Bill](#)
- [House Joint Resolution 131 by Coleman - Proposing a constitutional amendment to repeal the constitutional provision providing that marriage in this state consists only of the union of one man and one woman.](#)

Recent or Upcoming Activity:



House Bill 616, authored by Rep. Marc Veasey (D-Fort Worth), was reported favorably out of the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence on March 11th by a vote of 8-2.

Equality Texas worked with Rep. Veasey's office to draft this legislation which would require the Attorney General to conduct a study on the effectiveness of the James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Act.

Since passage of the Hate Crimes Act in 2001, there have been over 1,800 crimes of bias and prejudice reported to the Texas Department of Public Safety. However, there have only been nine (9) prosecutions under the Act.

The vote on HB 616 in the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence was as follows:

Voting Yes:

Pete Gallego, Alpine
Terri Hodge, Dallas
Carol Kent, Dallas
Robert Miklos, Mesquite
Joe Moody, El Paso
Paula Pierson, Arlington
Allen Vaught, Dallas
Hubert Vo, Houston

Voting No:

Wayne Christian, Center
Allen Fletcher, Tomball

Absent:

Debbie Riddle, Tomball

Current Advocacy Campaign:

Thank Your Representative!

If your state representative is one of the eight committee members who voted favorably on this bill, please take a moment to click on the link above to send them an e-mail of thanks. *These members are especially important as two (2) additional bills in our legislative agenda have been referred to this same committee.*

Rep. Veasey's bill now moves to the House Calendars Committee. Equality Texas will be lobbying members of the Calendars Committee to schedule HB 616 for full debate on the House floor.

Equality Texas will issue an Action Alert as soon as HB 616 is scheduled for floor debate. At that time, we will launch a statewide advocacy campaign in support of the bill on the House floor.



House Bill 538, authored by Rep. Mike Villarreal (D-San Antonio), would prohibit discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. HB 538, "The Freedom from Workplace Discrimination Act", has been referred to the House Committee on State Affairs. Equality Texas is joining with Rep. Villarreal in his efforts to secure a public hearing for HB 538.

Current Advocacy Campaign:

Support "The Freedom from Workplace Discrimination Act"

If you reside in Texas, please take a moment to click on the link above and sign the petition in support of Rep. Villarreal's HB 538. All the petitions will be delivered by Rep. Villarreal to the Honorable Burt Solomons, Chair of the House Committee on State Affairs.



House Bill 2966, authored by Rep. Garnet Coleman (D-Houston), would amend the James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Act to add gender identity or expression.



On Tuesday, March 17th, HB 2966 was referred to the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence. This is the same committee which reported favorably on Rep. Veasey's Hate Crimes Study bill. Equality Texas is currently lobbying committee members to schedule Rep. Coleman's bill for a public hearing.

Action Alerts and/or Advocacy Campaigns will be issued to subscribers of Equality Texas' Action Alert e-mail list as necessary.



House Bill 3026, also authored by Rep. Garnet Coleman (D-Houston), would repeal §21.06 of the Penal Code, the Homosexual Conduct Law, which was declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court in the 2005 *Lawrence v. Texas* decision. The bill would also amend the Health and Safety Code to delete the statement that **homosexual conduct is not an acceptable lifestyle and is a criminal offense under §21.06 of the Penal Code**. [emphasis added for language to be deleted by the bill].

On Tuesday, March 17th, HB 3026 was also referred to the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence. Equality Texas is lobbying committee members for a public hearing on HB 3026. Action Alerts and/or Advocacy Campaigns will be issued as needed.

Lobbying efforts continue on the other bills composing our legislative agenda, and additional requests will be forthcoming for citizen advocacy in support of those bills.

NEW WEBSITE! NEW BLOG! NEW WEB2.0!

Equality Texas has launched a new and functionally-improved version of our website at www.EqualityTexas.org



The new site is designed to function as a resource for anyone interested in public policy, specifically as it relates to discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. Our goal is to reach not only those Texans who are familiar with the issues we address, but to reach Texans of all sexual orientations and gender identities/expressions who are unfamiliar with the effect of public policy on people's daily lives.

The new site is organized into four (4) primary areas:

- **EDUCATE** - Yourself and others
- **ADVOCATE** - For an end to discrimination
- **VOLUNTEER** - In your local community, and
- **DONATE** - To make our work possible.

While we are still in the process of adding content in all areas, new features include the [Legislative Information Center](#), an [Event Calendar](#) organized by region, [Volunteer Opportunities](#) by region, and the ability to [Share Your Story](#).

Please surf the new site and let us know what you think. The Legislative Session makes for some very hectic times, so it will be a little while longer before all areas are fully operational.

With the launch of the new website, Equality Texas has also launched additional Web2.0 sites in order to reach the greatest number of constituents interested in ending discrimination. Please check out our ancillary sites:

- [Equality Texas Blog](#)
- [Equality Texas on MySpace](#)
- [Equality Texas on Facebook](#)
- [Equality Texas Video Center on YouTube](#)
- [Equality Texas Photo Galleries on Flickr](#)
- [Equality Texas on Twitter](#)



FOUNDATION NAMED BLACK TIE DINNER BENEFICIARY

On March 16th, Equality Texas Foundation was named as a beneficiary of the 2009 Black Tie Dinner. Equality Texas Foundation joins 18 local organizations, along with the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, as this year's beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries were selected by the Black Tie Dinner Board of Directors through a detailed examination and rating process. Applicants were evaluated on their financial & organizational health and stability, their service to the North Texas LGBT community, including the quality and impact of programs, services, and activities.

The 2009 Black Tie Dinner will be held October 3, 2009 at the Sheraton Dallas Hotel. More information on the event is available at www.blacktie.org

Equality Texas Foundation is honored to be a 2009 Black Tie Dinner beneficiary. Please designate Equality Texas Foundation in your table and ticket designations. Proceeds from Black Tie Dinner help to fund Equality Texas Foundation's outreach and public education efforts in North Texas, including our Safe Schools Initiative, Equality Project, and Pride in Faith programs.



BLACK TIE DINNER, INC.

UPCOMING EVENTS

EVENTS



Legislative Issues Affecting LGBT People of Color

Thursday, March 26th from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Monica's Aca y Alla, 2914 Main Street, Dallas, 75226

Hosted by Valiente and Legacy of Success Foundation

Guest presenters: Paul Scott, Equality Texas and Steve Atkinson, Human Rights Campaign

More information is available on the [Equality Texas Event Calendar](#).

EVENTS



2009 Spirit of Texas Brunch, featuring Kate Clinton

Sunday, May 17th from 11 am to 2 pm

Sunset Station, 1174 East Commerce Street, San Antonio

Keynote address by
Kate Clinton



Individual sponsorships start at \$500
Corporate sponsorships start at \$1,000
Title sponsorship is available for \$25,000

[More information and purchase sponsorships](#)

Lower floor tables of ten are \$1,000
Upper floor individual tickets are \$75

[More information and purchase tickets](#)



Lobbying & Advocacy

(not deductible, but funds our work at the Capitol)

[Single gift](#)

[Monthly giving](#)

Public Education

(tax deductible)

[Single gift](#)

[Monthly giving](#)

Thank you for supporting our work!

**YOU
MAKE
EQUALITY
HAPPEN**

