

# EQUALITY

e-newsletter

T E X A S

September 3, 2009

## EQTX: Making Equality Happen in Texas

ELP: [Domestic Partner Benefits in El Paso](#)

AUS/HOU/SAT: [Safe Schools Forums in Austin, Houston & San Antonio](#)

DFW: [Designate EQTX Foundation for Black Tie Dinner; Former Board Chair to Receive Kuchling Award](#)

HOU: [Annise Parker Endorsed for Mayor of Houston](#)

## News from Other Statewide Equality Groups

[ME.WA.M.I.A.C.A](#)

## How You Can Help

[Ask your friends](#) to join the EQTX Action Center and Make Equality Happen.

Verify the accuracy of your contact info and email subscriptions. [Login to your Action Center account.](#)

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## Invest in Equality Texas



## Find Your Elected Officials

[Find My Elected Officials](#)

## Take Action

[Equality Texas Action Center](#)

## From Executive Director Paul Scott

Dear Equality Texas Member,

Equality Texas acknowledges the importance of multiple strategies to achieve equality, and we believe they can have positive effects on achieving policy goals and objectives. As the statewide organization working for equality here in Texas, our mission and our focus must be on Texans. As good stewards, we must maintain the focus on our state while honoring the energy and efforts of activists organizing to go to Washington, DC for the March on Washington on October 10th.

**Equality Texas' first priority will be to ask our members to think about how they can take direct action to affect change in Texas.** We will be asking members to spend their time and resources to elect Annise Parker as the first openly lesbian mayor of Houston and the first openly LGBT mayor of our nation's fourth largest city. **Annise Parker's election to office is a critical battle that must be won in order to advance equality in Houston and in Texas.** The weeks just before this November's election are critical to a successful get-out-the-vote operation.

We will be asking our members in West Texas to continue to support the City of El Paso's provision of domestic partner benefits for their city employees. We are expecting a possible ballot initiative that could come as early as November to protect these benefits. Additionally, we will also be asking our members to hold Fort Worth and TABC officials accountable for their actions in the Rainbow Lounge raid, and asking members to become involved with Fairness Fort Worth.

**With these battles happening here in our own backyard, there are some great opportunities to channel energy into direct action with immediate results.** We must harness the power of Texans that support equality and demonstrate our ability to move people to make positive change here, as well as in DC. Similarly, our peers in Maine are desperate to have people come during October to work against the ballot initiative that would invalidate the legislature's and the governor's approval of marriage equality.

Equality Texas supports our members' participation in the March on Washington. However, we know the importance of work here in Texas that can have a dramatic effect on equality at the state and local level. Our mission, our work, and our strategic plan are all focused on effecting change in the most strategic way right here in Texas. Because we have limited resources, we must focus on these priorities.

We think all activism is a good thing. When participants in the March come home, we ask that they devote their time, energy and resources to do the work that must be done right here in Texas.

Sincerely,

Paul Scott, Executive Director

P.S. Will you help us continue our work by [investing in Equality Texas](#) today? Your [contribution](#) makes a real difference.

EQTX: Making Equality Happen in Texas

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## Domestic Partner Benefits for City of El Paso



**On August 25th, by a vote of 7 to 1, the El Paso City Council approved the provision of health insurance benefits to domestic partners of city employees.** The lone dissenting vote was cast by District 4 Representative Carl L. Robinson.

As approved, health insurance benefits will be available to the domestic partners of city employees - both gay and straight. The benefits would commence in January, 2010. Under the City's benefit plan structure, approximately 35% of the health insurance premium is paid by the employee and 65% is paid by the employer.

El Paso now joins the cities of Austin and Dallas, plus Travis County, as governmental jurisdictions in Texas providing health insurance benefits to domestic partners. Closer to El Paso, the cities of Albuquerque and Las Cruces in New Mexico, and Phoenix, Scottsdale, Tempe and Tucson in Arizona also provide partner health insurance.

**Equality Texas has been working with local community members and organizations since the June 29, 2009 incident at a Chico's Tacos restaurant when a public kiss resulted in the removal of five gay men.** On July 21, 2009 the El Paso City Council unanimously adopted a resolution rejecting acts of discrimination, intolerance and bigotry. Since that time, Equality Texas has issued four (4) Action Alerts - one in support of the nondiscrimination resolution and three action alerts in support of domestic partner benefits. Equality Texas has coordinated discussions with El Paso leaders and with national partners to develop talking points and strategies. Additionally, Equality Texas staff and intern Beth Casey have provided research on these issues to city council members and Equality Texas members.

Public testimony in support of the benefit plan was effectively coordinated by local organizations including Puentes LGBT Resources, Rio Grande Adelante and members of the congregation at MCC El Paso.

Equality Texas Political Director Randall Terrell worked to facilitate supportive testimony from Texas State Senator Eliot Shapleigh. In written testimony, Senator Shapleigh urged, "Do the right thing for equality and fairness. Do the right thing to ensure that the City can compete for talented employees. I urge you to approve the City's budget with partner health insurance."

Terrell also obtained supportive testimony from Ken Miyagishima, Mayor of Las Cruces, who stated, "We passed domestic partner benefits in Las Cruces without a lot of discussion or debate because it was the right thing to do. I strongly suggest that El Paso provide domestic partner benefits, as well."

**Opponents of the benefit plan have stated their desire to use the City's referendum and initiative process to force a citywide ballot measure on the issue.** Equality Texas is already working on legal analysis of the referendum process and will continue to be engaged with local community members and organizations to help ensure that health benefits remain available to domestic partners.

[Back To Top](#)

## Safe Schools Forums Coming to Austin, Houston and San Antonio



Every student in Texas schools deserves an education free from the harmful physical and emotional effects of harassment and bullying. However, as schools across the state are reopening for the Fall term, thousands of Texas children dread going to school to face the taunts, jeers, humiliation, physical intimidation and pain inflicted through harassment and bullying.

**The Equality Texas Foundation is concerned that most school districts' current policies on bullying and harassment may be inadequate, or inadequately enforced.** Although Texas' schools have worked to make safe schools a reality by putting in place bullying and harassment policies required by the Texas Education Code, we believe current statutes do not yet adequately address the prevention, intervention, and elimination of bullying and harassment from our schools.

Although well-defined and communicated policies help deal with bullying and harassment when it happens, a comprehensive program is necessary for prevention. Programs that integrate a data-tracking system for bullying and harassment incidents, a robust district-level policy that is consistently enforced, and a research-proven program to educate both students and staff about bullying and harassment have been found to be the most effective.

On Wednesday, September 16, 2009, the Equality Texas Foundation will host the first of several open community forums on safe schools.

**Community Forum on Safe Schools - Austin**

**Wednesday, September 16, 2009**

**6:00 p.m.**

**Baker School Cafeteria**

**3908 Avenue B**

**Austin, TX 78751**

Panelists:

Kimme Mitchell – Parent of a bullied child in the Georgetown ISD;

Megan Flowers – Coordinator, No Place for Hate program of the Anti-Defamation League;

Dianna Groves – Student Intervention Specialist, Dept. of Student Support, Austin ISD.

**Parents and students are encouraged to join us for this important open discussion on school safety.** This forum is presented by Equality Texas Foundation, in collaboration with the City of Austin Human Rights Commission, the Anti-Defamation League, the Texas Civil Rights Project, and the Texas GSA Network – a project of Out Youth.

Community Forums on Safe Schools have been scheduled for:

**Community Forum on Safe Schools - Houston**

**Wednesday, September 23, 2009**

**6:00 p.m.**

**Lamar High School Cafeteria**

**3325 Westheimer Road**

**Houston, TX 77098**

**Community Forum on Safe Schools - San Antonio**

**Wednesday, October 21, 2009**

**6:00 p.m.**

**UTSA Downtown Campus**

**Durango Building, Southwest Room**

**San Antonio, TX**

Additional Community Forums are planned for North Texas and West Texas. Watch for additional information.

[Back To Top](#)

**Designate EQTX Foundation for Black Tie Dinner;  
Former Board Chair Steve Atkinson to  
Receive Kuchling Humanitarian Award**



**BLACK TIE**  
DINNER

**Equality Texas Foundation** is once again a beneficiary of the Black Tie Dinner that supports 18 local beneficiaries and HRC, its national beneficiary.

The support from Black Tie Dinner is instrumental in continuing our work in North Texas with our Equality Project trainings, Pride in Faith programs, and our collaborative work to educate Texans about the critical importance of education and advocacy to achieve equality in Dallas, Fort Worth, Plano, Denton, and across the entire state.

**If you attend Black Tie or know someone that does, then you can directly impact the work of Equality Texas Foundation** as we continue to expand our outreach and make equality happen here in Texas!

**Simply, being a table captain for Equality Texas Foundation or designating your table and its seats** means that your locally designated funds will support our mission directly. We could not continue to do our work without your support and the support of Black Tie Dinner.



**The Black Tie Dinner Board of Directors announced that activist and community volunteer Steve Atkinson will be**



**this year's recipient of the prestigious Kuchling Humanitarian Award.** Each year since 1983, the Black Tie Dinner Board of Directors has awarded the Kuchling Humanitarian Award to local individuals who have made extraordinary gifts of their time and talents on behalf of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.

Atkinson has served as a shining example of leadership for more than 16 years. From walking the streets of Dallas for political campaigns or holding a placard to protest injustice, he has worked tirelessly to move the LGBT community toward full equality at the local, state and national levels.

Steve served for many years on our board of directors and is a former board co-chair. Steve and his partner of 20 years, Ted Kincaid, have two tables at Black Tie Dinner this year, and they have designated both as Equality Texas Foundation tables, and have designated each guest's designation to the Foundation.

Congratulations to Steve and many thanks for his years of support and service!

[Back To Top](#)

## **Annise Parker Endorsed for Mayor of Houston**

Equality Texas is asking its members to spend their time and resources to elect Annise Parker as the first openly lesbian mayor of Houston and the first openly LGBT mayor of our nation's fourth largest city. **Annise Parker's election to office is a critical battle that must be won in order to advance equality in Houston and in Texas.**



**Annise Parker is simply the best candidate to move Houston forward.**

- Annise Parker has what it takes to manage Houston through tough economic times.
- As City Controller, Annise directs Houston's financial investments and manages billions of tax dollars. Because of her fiscal responsibility and leadership, Houston is stronger today than other major cities that gambled their futures on risky investments and irresponsible budgets.
- Annise has a plan to create jobs, secure Houston's future as the headquarters for new energy development, and maintain fiscal responsibility. As Mayor, Annise will fight to create good-paying jobs using national stimulus program and local funds – and to make sure the paychecks go to Houston families.
- At every step of the way, Annise has worked hard to make Houston better and improve the quality of life for Houstonians.
- Annise's roots in Houston run deep. She was born and raised in Houston, as were her parents – who met as students at the University of Houston. Annise and her life partner, Kathy Hubbard, have been together since 1990. They have two children.

### **Save the Dates - October 3rd & 4th!**

Save these dates for "Days of Service" for Annise Parker's election campaign. Volunteer opportunities will include block-walking and phone-banking. Volunteers interested in phone-banking do not have to physically be located in Houston.

If you live in Houston, volunteer phone banks are open each Tuesday and Thursday from 6 to 9pm.

[CLICK HERE](#) for 6 Easy Ways to Get Involved.

[Back To Top](#)

**News from Other Statewide Equality Groups**

**Maine: You Can Help Protect Marriage Equality**



In May, Maine became the fifth state in the country to win marriage for same-sex couples. Within days of this victory, the opposition launched a People's Veto campaign - modeled after California's Prop 8 - to take away the right of same-sex couples to marry. Maine is now ground zero in the national fight for marriage equality.

To win, we need your help. Please consider a [Volunteer-Vacation](#), where you'll have the opportunity to volunteer full-time with the No on 1 campaign to protect marriage at the ballot box. This is a 1 or 2 week structured program offering an intensive, hands-on chance to hone your campaign skills.

#### Washington: Domestic Partnerships Under Attack

This spring, Governor Gregoire signed the 2009 Domestic Partnership Expansion Bill, completing the Domestic Partnership System in Washington State, giving all couples in Washington State equal protection under the law. **Opponents of the domestic partnership law are seeking to repeal it through a referendum.** Referendum 71 would ask voters whether the law should be approved or rejected. A vote to "APPROVE" keeps the law so that all families will have these protections in all parts of the state.

If you live in Washington, call [Equal Rights Washington](#) at (206) 324-2570 to volunteer to help preserve the Domestic Partnership law. For more information, visit the [Washington Families Standing Together website](#).

#### Michigan: Defending Discrimination Protections



In July, City Commissioners in Kalamazoo, Michigan passed an ordinance prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in employment, housing, and public accommodations in the city. Anti-equality forces immediately challenged the law and submitted 1,624 signatures to put the issue on the ballot, suspending the law until election time.

Equality is not equality unless it's equality for all. The right-wing continues to demonize transgender people to lie to uninformed voters. We need to stop them everywhere. We need to stop them in Kalamazoo. Visit the [One Kalamazoo](#) website to learn more. To find out how you can get involved, [click here](#).

#### Iowa: NOM Backing Anti-Equality Legislator



Last week the National Organization for Marriage (NOM) started flooding rural Iowa with nearly \$90,000 worth of ads trying to scare Iowans into voting for an anti-gay legislative candidate. **The same extremists that bankrolled ballot initiative efforts in Maine and California are now spending money to buy an election in Iowa.**

It takes some nerve for a New Jersey-based group, with ties to the Mormon Church to fund a "Reclaim Iowa" project on behalf of wealthy out-of-state extremists. NOM doesn't want you to know who is behind these efforts and they pledge to shield their donors from outside scrutiny by refusing to release this information.

**Don't let them get away with it! [Sign One Iowa's petition demanding a full disclosure of NOM's anti-gay funding!](#)**

#### California: Winning Back Marriage Equality

[Equality California](#) recently released a report of their comprehensive research and analysis as to the best time to go back to the voters to win back the right to marry in California and recommends getting to work now to set the stage for the complete repeal of Prop 8 in 2012.

The report, [Winning Back Marriage in California: Analysis and Plan](#), is a proposed 3-year-effort to repeal the ban on marriage for same-sex couples in 2012 with coordinated statewide organizing both on the ground and online, opportunities for families headed by same-sex couples to share their stories through advertising and other platforms, a timeline for a victory and an opportunity for both grassroots leaders and larger organizations to work together.

EQCA arrived at its position after carefully considering input from vital stakeholders: LGBT community members, grassroots organizers, leaders in communities of color and faith, donors and coalition partners, as well as political strategists. It also conducted in-depth analysis of turnout models, polling and fundraising. Key factors that led to the decision include the belief of leaders in communities of color that moving likely voters in their respective communities requires more time, as well as the enormous challenge of raising the \$40 to \$50 million dollars needed to run an effective campaign during one of the nation's worst recessions.

[Back To Top](#)

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[Equality Texas](#) advocates and lobbies for the elimination of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

[Equality Texas Foundation](#) educates and engages the public about policies and their effect on Texans of all sexual orientations and gender identities/expressions.

*The effectiveness of our work depends on the financial support of individuals who believe in equality for all people.*

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**YOU  
MAKE  
EQUALITY  
HAPPEN**

