



Leadership Council
of Aging Organizations

Katie Smith Sloan, Chair

July 21, 2021

Dear Senator:

The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) is a coalition of 69 national organizations working to preserve and strengthen the well-being of older adults. LCAO shares a vision of a society made more whole and vital through the genuine inclusion and celebration of our diverse aging populations, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) older adults. In this spirit, and on behalf of the LCAO membership, I urge you to pass the Equality Act (H.R. 5), a comprehensive federal nondiscrimination law that promotes equal treatment for LGBT people of all ages.

LGBT older people are a diverse and widespread community, residing in every area of the country. Although the U.S. Census has never measured how many LGBT people live in America, reports estimate that there are currently around 3 million LGBT adults over the age of 50. That number is expected to grow to around 7 million by 2030.

LGBT older people came of age at a time when simply being openly LGBT could get them arrested, fired, or worse. As such, they have experienced extensive discrimination based on their perceived or actual sexual orientation and gender identity. Moreover, they've lived through many years in which this discrimination was condoned—and even encouraged—by society in the form of laws, policies, and cultural norms.

“LGBT older adults deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. No one should be denied housing because they have a same-sex partner, be refused medical care because of their gender presentation, or be forced back into the closet because they fear repercussions at a nursing home. That’s why elected officials need to act swiftly to pass the Equality Act and provide much-needed civil rights protections for all LGBT people, including older adults,” said Katie Smith Sloan, LCAO chair.

Discrimination can negatively impact an individual’s opportunities in education, employment, housing stability, and much more. A lifetime of discrimination, especially in housing and employment, and a long-term lack of legal and social recognition combine to create deep economic insecurity and health disparities for LGBT older adults. In general, LGBT people are poorer and have fewer financial resources than their heterosexual, cisgender peers. Research has repeatedly shown that LGBT people have higher rates of poor physical health and mental distress. A national study of transgender people found that in the prior year, 23 percent of

respondents avoided going to a doctor when they needed to because they feared being mistreated, and 33 percent did not go because they could not afford it.

Additionally, bias and discrimination can make it more difficult for LGBT older people to find housing that is safe, affordable, and conducive to aging in community. In a matched-pair test across 10 ten states, 48 percent of same-sex couples experienced adverse treatment when seeking senior housing. Furthermore, nearly one-quarter (23 percent) of transgender individuals report having experienced some form of housing discrimination in the past year.

The bipartisan Equality Act will update federal law to include explicit, enduring nondiscrimination protections for LGBT Americans in key areas of life, including employment, housing, education, and public spaces. Although 21 states and over 300 cities have passed LGBT nondiscrimination protections, 50 percent of LGBT people live in the 29 states that still lack comprehensive statewide laws. This patchwork of civil rights protections is unsustainable and leaves too many people behind.

Despite these challenges, LGBT older adults are remarkably resilient. They were the trailblazers who pushed back at the Stonewall uprising and the caregivers who stood by loved ones through the height of the AIDS epidemic. They have helped to bring about remarkable change for LGBT people in just the past few decades.

LCAO is staunchly committed to equal treatment for all older adults. Consistent with this commitment, we call on Congress to pass the Equality Act (H.R. 5). These basic nondiscrimination protections for LGBT people will help create a society in which older adults and younger generations can live and age in community with dignity, health, and safety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katie Smith Sloan".

Katie Smith Sloan, Chair