

Talking Points

Equality Act

National Council of Jewish Women's Message

National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) believes in *kavod habriyot*, individual dignity. To that end, we are committed to the enactment, enforcement, and preservation of laws and regulations that protect civil rights and individual liberties for all. The Equality Act (HR 5), introduced by Rep. David Cicilline (D-RI) and Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR), passed the House in February 2021 but has not been taken up by the Senate. This critical legislation would add explicit protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity to our civil rights laws. The bill would also add and expand legal protections for women, people of color, and many other communities. **Congress must pass the Equality Act to protect all individuals from discrimination regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.**

- **LGBTQ individuals to face rampant discrimination.** A 2020 study by the University of Chicago found that one in three LGBTQ Americans faced identity-based discrimination of some kind in the past year, with that number increasing to three in five for transgender people. Discrimination happens in the spheres of employment, education, housing, public accommodations, and health care — every part of a person's life. LGBTQ people of color, immigrants, legal minors, and those with disabilities face even more barriers and biases.
- **The country needs explicit, permanent protections against LGBTQ discrimination.** In June 2020, the Supreme Court ruled in *Bostock v. Clayton County* that employers could not discriminate against their employees on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. While the Biden administration has ordered the federal government to apply the *Bostock* prohibition broadly, future administrations could roll back these important protections. The Equality Act would add “sexual orientation and gender identity” to laws prohibiting discrimination in nearly every area of life, including housing and education — making *Bostock*'s protections more broad and permanent.
- **Congress must pass the Equality Act to advance gender justice.** The Equality Act would add nondiscrimination protections on the basis of sex to public accommodations and federally funded programs, as well as expand the definition of public accommodations to more places people visit daily, like stores, salons, and entertainment venues. Filling these critical gaps in nondiscrimination protections would impart meaningful change in the lives of women — particularly Black, Indigenous, Latina, immigrant, disabled, and transgender women who face additional and intersecting discrimination. People of every and no gender deserve to participate freely and fully in their lives and communities without fear of discrimination.