

November 17, 2015

An open letter to
The Honorable Mike Pence, Governor
The Honorable David Long, President Pro Tem of the Senate
The Honorable Timothy Lanane, Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Brian Bosma, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Scott Pelath, House Minority Leader

Dear Governor Pence, Senate President Long, Senate Minority Leader Lanane, Speaker Bosma and Minority Leader Pelath:

Fewer than eight months ago, Indiana took a step backwards when the legislature passed, and Governor Pence signed, a religious refusal law that invited businesses and other service providers to refuse to hire lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (“LGBT”) people, and turn away LGBT customers. The nation noticed. LGBT people around the country reacted in outrage. Major corporations based in Indiana, business groups, and the NCAA expressed grave concern, because Indiana’s failure to protect LGBT people from discrimination sullies the state’s reputation, drives away business, and prevents Hoosier businesses and other institutions from hiring and retaining talented workers, students, and athletes.

Indiana’s legislature is expected to take up legislation amending Indiana’s civil rights laws this session. As an organization advocating on behalf of LGBT Hoosiers and those living with HIV Lambda Legal is committed to working with legislators, the Governor, and the citizens of Indiana to pass a bill that adds “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” to Indiana’s existing civil rights law to create express protection from discrimination on these grounds, just as Indiana law currently prohibits discrimination against Hoosiers based on ancestry, color, disability, national origin, race, religion, sex, or status as a veteran.

We stand with the majority of Hoosiers who support updating Indiana law to make sure that these protections are in place. This is the only way to ensure that LGBT Hoosiers are treated fairly, and that anyone visiting or looking to do business in Indiana knows that we are open and welcome to all.

We wish to be clear: half-measures, such as amending Indiana’s employment discrimination law, but not its laws banning similar discrimination by service providers such as hotels or restaurants, or omitting protection from discrimination for transgender people would be completely unacceptable to us, to LGBT Hoosiers and to others around the country anxious to see, after last year’s display of intolerance, whether Indiana is committed to being a welcoming state for residents, employees, convention-goers, and other visitors alike.



We cannot support legislation that: 1) leaves any segment of the LGBT community behind by not offering full, explicit protections; 2) treats discrimination against LGBT people differently from other forms of discrimination prohibited under Indiana law, including by the addition of hurtful carve-outs for service providers who wish to refuse to serve LGBT people for religious reasons; 3) lessens or waters down protections in existing law for other groups that face discrimination; or 4) leaves out full employment, housing and public accommodations protections for LGBT people.

LGBT Hoosiers have a right to expect protection from discrimination by the addition of “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” to Indiana’s existing civil rights laws. It’s as simple as that. We will support legislation in every way possible that achieves this goal and are committed to working with bill sponsors, legislative leadership, and our partners, Freedom Indiana, Indiana Competes, Tech for Equality, and Hoosier businesses moving forward.

Let’s get this done.

Sincerely,

James L. Bennett
Midwest Regional Director

Camilla Taylor
Counsel