



## 35 Years and Stronger Than Ever

Lambda Legal recently took up a case on behalf of the Hudson Valley, New York, LGBTQ Community Center, after its application for a nonprofit property tax exemption was denied. Although the center’s mission clearly entitles it to the exemption, the city of Kingston did not see it that way. We are going to bat for the community center but also for the larger principle: Time and time again LGBT organizations have had to fight to prove they should receive the same benefits that other nonprofit organizations receive. History was repeating itself — both for LGBT communities and for Lambda Legal, which was forced to fight for its own right to exist as a nonprofit organization three decades ago.

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Today it may seem like a simple premise — a national legal organization dedicated to making the case for equality on behalf of LGBT people and people living with HIV. But only 35 years ago it was so revolutionary that a panel of New York judges at first rejected Lambda Legal’s application for nonprofit status. In their view, our mission, equality for gay people, was “neither benevolent nor charitable.” We fought that case and won and have been fighting ever since. A year later Lambda Legal opened for business in a tiny Greenwich Village apartment. Our pioneering strategy: Combine groundbreaking work in the courts with innovative public education to make the greatest impact on the lives of LGBT people and those with HIV across the nation.

Years later that strategy is still going strong, though we’ve grown from a few employees in a studio apartment to a staff of over 100 working out of offices in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta and Dallas. In short, we have become the most powerful legal rights organization in the country working on behalf of LGBT people and those with HIV.

Since our groundbreaking Supreme Court victory *Lawrence v. Texas* — which struck down all remaining state sodomy laws in the nation and launched a new era of respect for LGBT people — more lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are living freer and more open lives. It’s been only five years since that victory, and while we are still only beginning to feel its legal impact, the cultural landscape has shifted profoundly: No longer are gay people branded as criminals by sodomy laws, and the bar on what constitutes equal treatment for our communities has been raised significantly.

Every day more same-sex couples are gaining the rights, privileges and responsibilities that most different-sex couples take for granted. More LGBT families are being respected and protected. More young people are growing up with positive role models and with laws that support instead of marginalize them. More LGBT people and people with HIV are experiencing fair treatment in the workplace.

As we celebrate our 35th year, we are poised for even more success. Our resolve hasn’t changed since we won that first case for our own right to exist and our mission has only grown stronger. Together we will continue the fight.

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