

Fairness Act Facts

What the bill does: Adds sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes in the WV Human Rights Acts and the Fair Housing Act. It will ensure LGBTQ people don't face discrimination in employment, housing and public spaces.

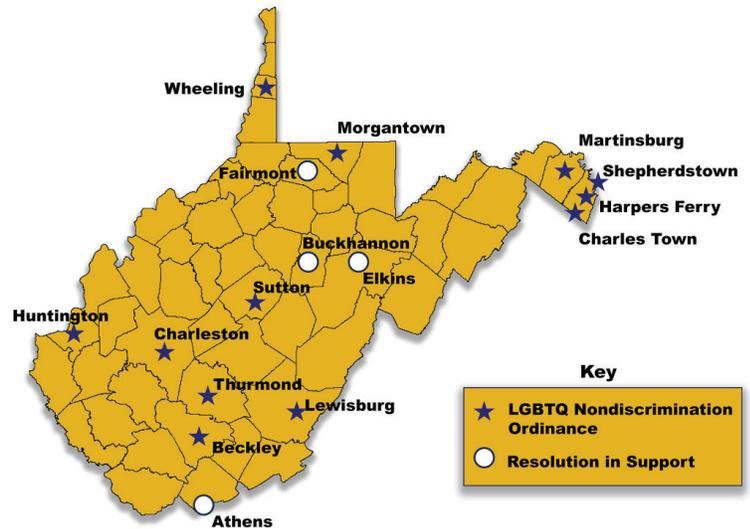
Why now?

1. It's currently legal in most of West Virginia to fire, evict, or deny someone service at a place of business just because they are a member of the LGBTQ community. It's time to change that.
2. Legal discrimination sends the wrong signal to companies considering relocating here who need to recruit the best and brightest employees. It discourages and to young people from staying and helping our economy grow. Discrimination doesn't pay!
3. Twelve of our state's communities have banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. About 200,000 people now live under a nondiscrimination ordinance, but that's only about 11 percent of our total state population. This patchwork of protections isn't enough. All people — regardless of their zipcode — should be protected.
4. Our LGBTQ neighbors deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. The Golden Rule, found in nearly every world religion, instructs us to treat others as we wish to be treated. More than 100 faith leaders recently endorsed the Fairness Act.
5. West Virginia has lost more population than any other state in the last decade, and our economy has grown stagnant. This bill will help grow our economy and improve our image to the rest of the world. Our state prides itself on our love of freedom, our sense of community, and our neighborliness. Let's show the rest of the country our West Virginia values by becoming the 21st state to pass comprehensive nondiscrimination.

FAIRNESS
WEST VIRGINIA

West Virginia is Ready

A growing number of our communities have adopted local laws banning discrimination. The diversity of these towns and cities demonstrates LGBTQ nondiscrimination is a popular and bipartisan issue. Local leaders have stepped up to protect their own citizens because they realize how urgently needed these protections are.



**U.S. CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE
ENDORSED**
LGBT NONDISCRIMINATION
PROTECTIONS AS GOOD
FOR BUSINESS

Fairness Act Mythbuster

Myth: Discrimination isn't a problem in West Virginia.

Fact: The harsh reality is that nearly two-thirds of LGBTQ Americans have reported experiencing discrimination in their everyday lives, including on the job – and the number of unreported incidents is likely much higher.

Half of all transgender people have been harassed by someone at their work, and, when asked to present identification, nearly one in five transgender people are refused service because of their gender markers. A recent study from the Williams Institute tells us that West Virginia actually has the highest percentage of transgender youth of any state in the country. It's important that all of our state's young people feel safe and supported.

Myth: This legislation violates religious freedom.

Fact: It does not. Freedom of religion is important to all of us — it's one of our nation's fundamental values.

That freedom is already protected under the First Amendment and our state's Human Rights Act. **The Fairness Act does not apply to churches or any other house of worship and will not curb the free speech of religious leaders.** Religious freedom should not give any of us the license to discriminate as business owners or landlords. Many people of faith in West Virginia are speaking out in support of the Fairness Act because of their deep faith, not in spite of their faith.

Myth: LGBTQ protections are unprecedented and untested.

Fact: Nondiscrimination laws have been on the books for decades in other states, and they have only strengthened communities that have adopted them.

Twenty states and more than 250 towns all across the country have already adopted comprehensive laws protecting their LGBTQ residents. In West Virginia, similar ordinances have been on the books for more than 12 years. It's time to update our non-discrimination laws and make the Mountain State a safe place to call home for everyone.

Myth: "Public accommodations" means restrooms and locker rooms.

Fact: Public accommodations are all the places we go when we're not at home, work, or school.

These include movie theaters, restaurants, parks, public transportation, and coffee shops; and yes, it includes being able to do something as basic as using the restroom in these places.

Myth: This legislation will put women at risk in restrooms and locker rooms.

Fact: We all care about safety, including transgender people, who need to use the restroom just like everyone else.

Harassment and sexual assault are both already illegal under West Virginia law, and the good news is that updating our non-discrimination protections absolutely keeps that in place. Anyone who enters a bathroom to do harm and harass others can and should be held accountable. Laws like the Fairness Act are on the books in 20 states, where there have been no uptick in related crimes. LGBTQ people, on the other hand, continue to be at high-risk for violence compared to the general population.

Myth: Transgender legal protections would require businesses and other public places to spend money to remodel their restrooms to be gender neutral or add restrooms or other sex-segregated facilities.

Fact: Not true. Businesses and public facilities won't have to spend a penny on remodeling or new construction.

Being protected from discrimination simply means customers are able to use the existing facilities that match the gender they live every day. Many businesses are publicly supporting this update because it will attract investment. We all want West Virginia to have a competitive economy that attracts the best talent, and updated nondiscrimination protections can help get us there.

Myth: This bill is just a ploy to destroy women's high school sports.

Fact: The State School Board sets policies for how public schools manage the eligibility requirements for school sports. This bill does nothing to change that.

However, both the NCAA and the Olympics both have policies to allow transgender athletes to compete in the correct category that matches the gender they live as every day. Those two institutions, both with incredibly high standards, say that a person's gender transition does not constitute an unfair competitive advantage.

It's heartbreaking to see some people attempt to attack transgender high schoolers. Growing up is hard enough for everyone, and it can be particularly painful for transgender students. The last thing our nation's young people need is politicians making it even harder by singling them out for their own political gain, and increasing their already high risk of bullying and harassment. The bottom line is: All America's children – transgender or not – should be treated with dignity and respect.