

HOW POLICYMAKERS CAN SUPPORT LGBT PEOPLE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

An estimated 2.9 to 3.8 million lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people live in rural communities across the United States, and they are part of the fabric of rural American life. They are small business owners, teachers and ministers, farmers and construction workers, and much more. LGBT people in rural communities often choose to live there for many of the same reasons that other people do: for the strength of community and connection to family, for the pace of life and closeness to nature, or simply to be part of the place where they were raised and call home.



However, the structural challenges facing all rural residents, such as fewer doctors or employers, can add to the challenges facing LGBT people in rural and urban areas alike, such as discrimination or mistreatment. By addressing the overall needs and challenges of rural areas, while also directly addressing LGBT-specific experiences in rural areas, meaningful and long-lasting change is possible in rural America, for both LGBT and non-LGBT residents.

ACTIONS POLICYMAKERS CAN TAKE TO SUPPORT LGBT PEOPLE LIVING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

- **Update nondiscrimination protections** in employment, housing, public accommodations, health care, education, the child welfare system, and more to include sexual orientation and gender identity. These protections will ensure that LGBT people, including those in rural communities, are treated fairly, can contribute to their communities, and provide for themselves and their families.
- **Work to eliminate harmful religious exemptions laws** that may allow taxpayer-funded discrimination. Freedom of religion is important, that's why it's already protected by the Constitution. But that freedom shouldn't be used to hurt people, to impose one's beliefs on others, or to discriminate.
- **Pass legislation to protect youth** from the harmful, discredited practice of conversion therapy and from bullying and discrimination at school. Work to repeal harmful laws that restrict the ability of educators to address students' needs, including "Don't Say Gay" laws and laws that restrict transgender students' access to restrooms and participation in school activities.
- **Update healthcare laws and policies** to eliminate harmful exclusions of necessary medical care for transgender people, and to modernize public health laws that currently criminalize people living with HIV.
- **Modernize identity document policies** to allow transgender people to easily and affordably update birth certificates and driver's licenses to match their gender identity.
- **Support and fund LGBT cultural competency trainings** for service providers, including in health care, education, child and family services, the legal system, and more.
- **Support and invest** in the work of people and organizations that serve LGBT people in rural communities.
- **Advocate for and fund research and data collection** on LGBT people in rural communities, including by adding sexual orientation and gender identity questions to government surveys and community need assessments.

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ACTIONS POLICYMAKERS CAN TAKE TO SUPPORT ALL PEOPLE, INCLUDING LGBT PEOPLE, LIVING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

- **Invest in infrastructure** such as high-speed, affordable internet access; improved public transit; schools; and community-based institutions like libraries, community centers, and health centers that provide job training, education, health care, and opportunities. Allocate funding to improve the capacity of these institutions and improve LGBT-inclusivity.
- **Rebuild and expand the social safety net** to ensure that residents have access to safe, affordable housing; high quality, affordable childcare; fresh, healthy food; and a living wage to allow people to improve their economic security.
- **Expand funding for rural health care**, paying particular attention to recruiting and retaining qualified physicians and healthcare providers with knowledge about LGBT populations, HIV prevention and treatment, and opioid abuse prevention and treatment.
- **End cash bail and pre-trial detention** and implement alternatives that allow those charged with nonviolent crimes to return to their families and workplaces while they await trial.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES OF LGBT PEOPLE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES IN THE NEW REPORT

WHERE WE CALL HOME: LGBT PEOPLE IN RURAL AMERICA

www.lgbtmap.org/rural-lgbt

View your state's LGBT policy profile at
www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps

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