

# IT'S TIME TO PASS THE EQUALITY ACT

Advocacy Toolkit



**GLSEN**<sup>®</sup>

[glsen.org/policy](https://glsen.org/policy)

# Table of Contents

- Introduction .....1
- Researching Your Senator .....2
- Forming Your Group .....3
- Getting a Meeting .....4
- Preparing for Your Meeting .....5
- After Your Meeting .....6
- Additional Advocacy for the Equality Act .....7

# Introduction

The purpose of this toolkit is to help you to request a meeting with your Senators to advocate for passage of the Equality Act.

## What is the Equality Act?

The Equality Act amends the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other civil rights laws to establish explicit federal nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people in housing, employment, public education, credit, public spaces, jury service, and all federally funded programs. For the first time in history, this legislation will also prohibit discrimination against women in public spaces and federal programs, and racial and religious discrimination in public spaces.

In June of 2020, the Supreme Court ruled in *Bostock v. Clayton County, Ga.* that Title VII, the federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in employment, includes discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. In early 2021, President Biden issued Executive Orders directing the Department of Education to apply these same protections in education settings under Title IX, a decision that is supported by the analysis conducted by the Department of Justice. Yet today only 17 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have laws that clearly protect students from discrimination based on both their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Under the Equality Act, LGBTQ+ students and educators in every state and territory of the U.S. will have nondiscrimination protections that will be difficult for a future Administration and courts to overturn.

The Equality Act was already passed by the U.S. House of Representatives for the second time in the Spring of 2021. Now, we must mobilize to ensure that it is passed in the Senate and signed into law.

## What you will find in this toolkit:

- A step-by-step guide to getting a meeting with your Senator on the Equality Act and ensuring that you enter that meeting feeling prepared and exit the meeting feeling successful;
- Template emails and telephone scripts that you can use to secure your meeting and thank those with whom you meet; and
- Links to a fact sheet about the Equality Act and other GLSEN resources that you can use to create your meeting talking points and share with your Senator and their staff.

**Remember, your Senators are your representatives. You are their constituent and you have every right to ask for their time and to have your voice heard! It's time to pass the Equality Act!**

# Researching Your Senator

Before getting a meeting with your Senator, you have to make sure you are reaching out to the right legislator and you have to make sure you know where they stand on LGBTQ+ rights, so that you can plan for a productive meeting.

## How can you find out who your Senators are?

Visit <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm>. If you select your state from the drop down menu, you will get the contact information for both Senators who represent your state.

## How can you find out where your Senator stands on equality for LGBTQ+ communities?

The webpage <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/393/cosponsors> lists every Senator who already co-sponsors the Equality Act. By co-sponsoring the bill, they have signalled their formal support for the Equality Act, and are committed to voting in favor of the bill when that time comes. If your Senator is not listed on this page, it means that they are not yet a co-sponsor.

## What if your Senator already supports the Equality Act?

It is still important to try to get a meeting about the Equality Act with Senators who have already co-sponsored the bill. Often constituents seek meetings to push legislators to take a stance that they have not taken, but it is also valuable to thank legislators for making the Equality Act a priority and standing up for LGBTQ+ students, educators, and the broader community. It is important to share with them why the Equality Act matters to you and any informative resources (see p. 5 below) that will help bolster their support and use the best available data points in their advocacy for the bill. This is also a chance to urge your Senator to support other legislation that affirms and protects LGBTQ+ students, such as the [Safe Schools Improvement Act](#).

## What if your Senator is opposed to the Equality Act?

Meeting with Senators who are publicly opposed to the Equality Act may feel intimidating, but it is deeply impactful. Senators represent everyone in their districts, not just those with whom they agree. Meeting with an opposing Senator is an opportunity to share your perspective on why this bill is so important. Stories about the lived experiences of students are particularly helpful in making the case for the Equality Act. Sometimes this can shift the way a legislator understands an issue, possibly impacting their vote now or planting a seed for future support on another issue. Finally, these meetings can be helpful for your own organizing. You may learn helpful details about your Senator's thinking on the bill that can inform GLSEN's advocacy. The emotional and mental well-being of those in your meeting group, especially youth, is the top priority. Only consider one of these meetings if everyone decides they are willing to hear the opposition's perspective and are able to both prepare for and debrief the experience.

# Forming Your Group

## Why meet with your Senator (or their staff) as a group?

This is a way to show that there is a broad base of support for the Equality Act. This may also be an opportunity to deepen your community connections: is there a teacher, family, clergy, or organizer you have been wanting to build a relationship with? Do you have a list of folks just waiting to get involved in something? Is there another organizing group that you might be able to partner with? When you extend the invitation, remember that this is a step in building an ongoing reciprocal relationship, consider how you also might support the needs of a new partner.

## Additional considerations for forming your group:

- Aim for a group of 3-4 people.
  - These meetings can be as short as 15 minutes, so this size of group ensures that everyone has a chance to speak.
- Think about how your group is centering those who experience overlapping oppressions, particularly LGBTQ+ students who are transgender, nonbinary, BIPOC and people with disabilities.
- Plan for support for those who may be more vulnerable.
  - Who in your group is prepared to speak up if someone is misgendered?
  - If someone in the group needs to take a step away, is there someone else in the group who can step outside of the meeting room with them?
  - Likewise, if the meeting is virtual and someone needs to go off camera and off mic, who can also go off camera and mic to check on them and provide support?
- If you have 6 or more participants, consider requesting separate meetings.
- ***We strongly recommend students be accompanied by an adult***

# Getting a Meeting

Contact either your Senator's DC office or their main District office to request an appointment. Meetings are usually held in virtual format, but some offices may offer the option of an in-person visit. Information to reach Senator's offices can be found once you find your senator at <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm>.

## Whether you reach out by phone or email, it is important to communicate a few specifics:

- Introduce yourself and others who are requesting a meeting.
- Clearly identify yourself as a constituent.
- Let staff know you are requesting a meeting about the Equality Act.
- Check messages and emails and be sure to reply to any additional questions staff may have.
- Create a log of contacts (names, titles, email addresses) so that you can refer back to all of the staff with whom you spoke.

For additional support on scheduling and preparing for a meeting contact the Public Policy Office at [policy@glсен.org](mailto:policy@glсен.org)

## Template: Getting a Meeting

### Phone script:

Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm a constituent and a [student/parent/ educator] calling to request a meeting on the Equality Act. In addition to myself, # constituents would join me who represent [students, parents, educators]. Can you share the best way to submit this request?

### Email script:

Dear [Contact Name],

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm a constituent, and a [student/parent/educator] [and a GLSEN Chapter Leader/other GLSEN group if applicable]. I'm writing to request a meeting with the Senator and/or staff to discuss support for the Equality Act and ensuring our schools are safe and welcoming of LGBTQ+ young people. In addition to myself, # constituents would join me who represent [students, parents, educators] (cc'ed here).

Thank you in advance for sharing your availability.

Best,

[Contact Name]

## Take a meeting with a staffer if the Senator is not available

Remember that a meeting with a staffer is not a consolation prize! Staff manage the work of the Office and execute the decisions of the Senator within their areas of responsibility.

# Preparing for Your Meeting

## Equality Act meeting goals that you want to prepare to achieve

- Ask your Senator to co-sponsor the Equality Act (or if they are already a cosponsor, thank them for doing so).
  - Ask your Senator to co-sponsor the Safe Schools Improvement Act if they have not already done so.
- Share stories that connect your asks: why does the Equality Act matter to you.
- Share statistics and data that demonstrate the need for the Equality Act.

## Make a plan for the meeting

- Who will lead introductions and help facilitate group participation?
- Who will make which asks?
- Who will share which stories?
- Who will share which state-specific statistics or facts?
- Who can take notes?
- Who can ask for and take a photo?

## Tips for Storytelling

- Choose stories that can be told simply and concisely while illustrating primary concerns or statistics.
- Embrace stories that speak to the morals and values that your group wants to highlight.
- Depending on your Senator and your group, consider highlighting support from communities of faith for the Equality Act, such as the **Interfaith Alliance's support of the Equality Act**.
- Storytelling is vulnerable work — make sure that the storyteller feels confident and practiced. Ultimately, telling the story should feel more empowering than intimidating.

## Resources

There are a number of resources that you can review to prepare your talking points and share with your Senator and their staff.

- **GLSEN's Equality Act Fact Sheet**.
- **GLSEN's State Snapshots** that highlights findings from the 2019 National School Climate Survey.
- **GLSEN's 2019 National School Climate Survey Executive Summary**. This can be especially helpful if your state is one of the few that does not have its own state snapshot.

# After Your Meeting

Once the meeting is over, there are a few final steps that your group can take to ensure that your advocacy was as effective as possible.

Take summary notes as soon as you can after the meeting is done, to make sure that you capture all that was said but that may not have been noted down during the conversation.

Email us at [policy@glsen.org](mailto:policy@glsen.org) or fill out our form at [glsen.org/EqualityActPhoto](https://glsen.org/EqualityActPhoto) to let us know how things went! Who did you meet with? How did it go? Did your Senator decide to support the Equality Act or were they already a co-sponsor? Did your group get to take a photo with the Senator or their staff (if so please share it with us)? Anything you need from us to follow-up?

Do not forget to promptly send a thank you email to your Senator or the staffer(s) you met and pass on additional resources that might be helpful in garnering their support for the Equality Act and other legislation that supports LGBTQ+ students!

## Thank You Template: Equality Act Non-Sponsors

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you again for making time to meet with [your names/organization/GLSEN chapter] today. We appreciate your listening to our concerns about safe, nondiscriminatory, and welcoming schools for transgender and nonbinary young people. We again urge you to support the Equality Act. Here are some resources on the educational and mental health impacts of discrimination on LGBTQ+ youth in schools:

- [GLSEN's 2019 National School Climate Survey](#).
- [Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color](#).

Another critical support for LGBTQ+ youth is the Safe Schools Improvement Act (**H.R. 4402, S. 2410**), which ensures school districts adopt a proven strategy for preventing and responding effectively to bias-motivated bullying. We hope you will co-sponsor this bill. Please let us know if we can be a resource on these and any other policies that promote safe, nondiscriminatory, and welcoming schools for LGBTQ+ and all young people.



## Thank You Template: Equality Act Co-Sponsors

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

It was such a pleasure to speak with you yesterday! Thank you again for making time to meet with [GLSEN \_\_\_\_\_ chapter/your names]. We are so grateful for your support of the Equality Act. Please let us know if we can be a resource as you work to get this critical bill passed.

[If applicable: As we also discussed, the Safe Schools Improvement Act (**H.R. 4402, S. 2410**) represents another critical support for LGBTQ+ youth who experience bullying and harassment. We hope you will co-sponsor this bill, too. Again, if you have questions or we can be a resource, please let us know.]

Finally, I wanted to share **GLSEN's 2019 National School Climate Survey** that is a helpful resource on learning more about the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in schools.

# Additional Advocacy for the Equality Act

Meeting with your Senators about the Equality Act is likely the most effective way to gain their support for the bill or thank them for being co-sponsors, but in addition to this strategy, there are three other ways that you can help to make sure the Equality Act Passes.

First, you can call your Senators and leave a message about why you support the Equality Act. You can find the phone number to leave them a message here: <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm>.

**If the Senator you are calling does not currently sponsor the Equality Act you can use this template phone script:**

## Phone Script #1: Equality Act Non-Sponsors

Hello \_\_\_\_\_. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm a constituent and a [student/parent/ educator] calling to ask you to co-sponsor the Equality Act.

The Equality Act will ensure that every young person is protected from discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity), or national origin. In 2019, 59.1% of LGBTQ+ students reported experiencing anti-LGBTQ+ discriminatory policies or practices at school. More than three-quarters (77.3%) of transgender students, and more than two-thirds (69.1%) of nonbinary students, reported experiencing anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination. LGBTQ+ young people who experienced anti-LGBTQ+ victimization at school were more likely to miss school, had lower GPAs, had lower self-esteem, and had higher levels of depression. This legislation offers a way to start solving these problems by ensuring all young people can thrive and reach their full potential.

Every person deserves to be protected from discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual orientation and gender identity. Please co-sponsor the Equality Act.

**If the Senator you are contacting is already an Equality Act co-sponsor, you can use the following template to leave them a thank you message:**

## Phone Script #2: Equality Act Co-Sponsors Thank You

Hello\_\_\_\_\_. My name is\_\_\_\_\_. I'm a constituent and a [student/parent/ educator] to thank you for co-sponsoring the Equality Act and ask that you continue to champion this legislation.

The Equality Act will ensure that every young person is protected from discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity), or national origin. In 2019, 59.1% of LGBTQ+ students reported experiencing anti-LGBTQ+ discriminatory policies or practices at school. More than three-quarters (77.3%) of transgender students, and more than two-thirds (69.1%) of nonbinary students, reported experiencing anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination. LGBTQ+ young people who experienced anti-LGBTQ+ victimization at school were more likely to miss school, had lower GPAs, had lower self-esteem, and had higher levels of depression. I wanted to share this information from GLSEN's 2019 National School Climate Survey with you to drive home how necessary and important the Equality Act is to me.

Thank you again for helping to ensure all young people can go to schools and future workplaces free of discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Second, you can write to your Senators at <https://act.glsen.org/a/equalityact>, with a customized message about why it is important that they co-sponsor the Equality Act, or thanking them for already having done so.

Finally, you can amplify your impact by sharing this toolkit with others!

For additional information contact us at [policy@glsen.org](mailto:policy@glsen.org).

**GLSEN<sup>®</sup>**

[glsen.org](https://www.glsen.org)