



May 14, 2017

Re: Vote FOR the Equality Act (H.R. 5) and AGAINST any Motion to Recommit

Dear Representative:

As the Director of Bend the Arc: Jewish Action, I urge you to vote in favor of Equality Act, (H.R. 5) and against any Motion to Recommit (MTR) offered, when it comes to a vote this week. This crucial legislation would provide desperately needed civil rights protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) individuals. As the largest national Jewish social justice organization focused exclusively on domestic policy, Bend the Arc supports this bill both for the sake of LGBTQ Jews, including our own staff and members, and because our Jewish values compel us to work for the full equality of all people in our country.

The Equality Act would prohibit discrimination against LGBTQ individuals across key areas of life including employment, housing, credit, education, public spaces and services, federally funded programs, and jury service. For too many LGBTQ Americans, their basic civil rights protections vary with their zip code; indeed, there is no federal law that explicitly prohibits the all-too-commonplace discrimination experienced by LGBTQ people on a daily basis, and more than 30 states still similarly lack such explicit nondiscrimination protections. The Equality Act would right this wrong. Further, it is crucial that when voting for this bill, you also vote against any MTR. A vote for the MTR could threaten not only this legislation's basic protections for LGBTQ people but also, depending on how it is drafted, decades long protections for people of color, women, and other minorities.

As a rabbi, and a leader of a Jewish organization, I deplore the ways in which religion has been used in an attempt to justify discrimination. "Religious liberty" is not threatened by the Equality Act. The religious freedom our nation was founded on gives us the right to hold any belief we choose and to act on our religious beliefs, but it does not allow us to harm or discriminate against others. Claiming that basic civil rights protections are a threat to "religious liberty" is an insult to those who have suffered religious persecution.

Our Jewish values compel us to work for a day when all Americans are protected from discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. Again, I urge you to vote for the Equality Act and against any MTR to see that LGBTQ Americans are afforded the same civil rights protections under the law as their fellow Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason Kimelman-Block".

Rabbi Jason Kimelman-Block
Washington Director, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action