

A foundation for understanding...

EQUAL RIGHTS for the Transgender Community

Transgender individuals need and deserve the same rights — no more and no less — as everyone else in our community.

The transgender community is one of the most vulnerable of all minorities. Its members, along with lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals, suffer overt abuse and discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations.

While all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (the LGBT community) need protection from discrimination, the transgender community is victimized disproportionately.

In the workplace: 90% of transgender people report harassment or mistreatment on the job; 56% have been fired or denied employment or promotion simply for being perceived as transgender.

In housing: 19% report being denied housing or evicted for being transgender.

In public accommodations: 53% report being verbally harassed; 29% report unequal treatment by police.

Reflecting the pervasive discrimination and lack of acceptance experienced by transgender people, 41% attempt or commit suicide. Transgender people are more likely than others to experience homelessness, depression, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS and other problems.

Despite this documented pattern, it is perfectly legal in Jacksonville to discriminate against transgender people — and all LGBT people. The city's Human Rights Ordinance (HRO), which forbids discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex and other factors, omits protection for LGBT people. To safeguard those rights, all that's needed is to add sexual orientation, gender identity and expression to the list of protected groups already covered by the HRO.

Equality starts with understanding. It's human nature: People automatically fear what's unfamiliar, and fear breeds discrimination. Equality comes when people learn to accept each other as individuals, without fear or judgment. This concept applies to racial, religious and other minorities, including transgender people.

By learning who transgender people are, by understanding their individual struggles, you can promote equality and can participate in the solution. The more people replace their fears with understanding, the sooner the transgender community will be treated with the same dignity and respect everyone deserves.

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