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U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Joins Merkley, Booker, Collins to lead Senate introduction of landmark, bipartisan Equality Act

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The Equality Act would ensure that LGBTQ Americans are protected by federal non-discrimination laws

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin, Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Susan Collins (R-ME) introduced historic, comprehensive federal legislation—the bipartisan *Equality Act of 2019*—to ban discrimination against LGBTQ Americans. They were joined by 43 of their Senate colleagues. The legislation was filed simultaneously in the U.S. House of Representatives by Rep. David Cicilline (D-RI), joined by 239 Representatives.

“It is just wrong that in a majority of states, LGBTQ Americans are not fully protected from being fired, evicted from their home, or denied services because of who they are or who they love. It is time to end this kind of discrimination because LGBTQ Americans should have the freedom of full equality,” **said Senator Baldwin**. “Every American deserves the freedom and opportunity to dream the same dreams, chase the same ambitions, and have the same shot at success. We have an opportunity to pass the *Equality Act* in the House this year and this will be an historic step forward but we can’t mistake progress for victory. That will only come when we bring about the change we need in Washington to get the job done

on full equality for every LGBTQ American across our country."

"Freedom is the ability to fully participate in American life. Today, the bell of freedom does not ring for LGBTQ Americans, who still face discrimination in 29 states," **said Senator Merkley.** "It is way past time to fully open the doors of opportunity for every American. Let's pass the*Equality Act*. Let's do it this year. And let us rejoice in the bells of freedom ringing for every American."

"All Americans deserve a fair opportunity to pursue the American dream," **said Senator Collins.** "Throughout my Senate service, I have worked to end discrimination against LGBTQ Americans, from leading the repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' to advocating for the passage of the *Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act*. It is time we ensure that all people are judged on their talents and abilities, and have full access to the services they need and the opportunities they seek. This bill marks the beginning of that process, and I urge my colleagues to join me as we take steps to build bipartisan consensus around the *Equality Act*."

"We cannot profess to be a nation of liberty and justice for all when our fellow Americans are discriminated against simply because of who they are and who they love," **Senator Booker said**. "The *Equality Act* fixes this injustice by clarifying that federal civil rights law protects LGBT Americans. Every single LGBT American who has ever been made to feel like they don't belong, who has ever been bullied, abused, or discriminated against because of who they are and who they love should know that, in the halls of Congress and in the highest levels of the federal government, we see you, we hear you, we love you."

"LGBTQ rights across the country are under attack. Just last night, the Trump administration approved a new cruel, discriminatory and hateful ban on transgender service members, President Trump has rolled back LGBTQ rights in our schools, in the workplace, and in adoption under the guise of 'religious liberty.' This is absolutely unacceptable, and we cannot let up the fight for equality for all," **said Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer**. "The *Equality Act* my colleagues and I are introducing today would ensure that millions more Americans enjoy the full protection of the law and are not discriminated against when it comes to employment, housing and other public accommodations. We have to keep speaking out and standing up for the civil rights of every American in order for equality to prevail."

"It is past time for the *Equality Act* to be written into law," **said Rep.**

Cicilline. “Democrats are committed to delivering results for the people, and that means all the people. No American should ever be treated as less than equal in the eyes of the law. I’m looking forward to getting this bill through the House this spring. Senator McConnell should take it up without delay.”

Despite major advances in equality for LGBTQ Americans, including nationwide marriage equality, the majority of states still do not have explicit LGBTQ non-discrimination protection laws.

The *Equality Act of 2019* would ensure LGBTQ people have the same non-discrimination protections as other Americans by adding sexual orientation and gender identity, alongside protected characteristics like race and religion, to existing federal laws. The bill would explicitly ban discrimination in a host of areas, including employment, housing, public accommodations, jury service, access to credit, and federal funding. The bill would also add protections against sex discrimination to federal laws where they had not been included previously, including those addressing public accommodations and federal funding.

In addition to Baldwin, Merkley, Booker, Collins, and Schumer, the legislation is cosponsored in the Senate by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Tom Carper (D-DE), Bob Casey (D-PA), Chris Coons (D-DE), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Doug Jones (D-AL), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Angus King (I-ME), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Edward J. Markey (D-MA), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Patty Murray (D-WA), Gary Peters (D-MI), Jack Reed (D-RI), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Tina Smith (D-MN), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Jon Tester (D-MT), Tom Udall (D-NM), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Mark Warner (D-VA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and Ron Wyden (D-OR).

The full text of the *Equality Act of 2019* is available here.

An online version of this release is available here.