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The Suburban And Rural Alliance of Pennsylvania: State Network Launched to Support Local Nondiscrimination Ordinances Protecting LGBT Pennsylvanians

HARRISBURG— Following Senator Bob Casey’s statement in support of marriage equality – and the US Supreme Court’s review of two landmark equality cases last week – lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Pennsylvanians are still left in the shadows of civil rights. **The Keystone State continues to lack even the most basic protections for LGBT citizens. Pennsylvania is the only state in the northeast United States in which it is perfectly legal to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation in employment, housing, and public accommodations.**

To combat this void in state law, 30 local governments have passed nondiscrimination ordinances inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes. To coalesce the growing movement, **The Suburban and Rural Alliance of Pennsylvania, or SARA PA**, has been independently formed by a network of local advocates who have been working together since 2010. Community leaders working to advance many of these ordinances have found it critical to connect in order to share best practices in helping each other succeed. SARA PA has launched [an extensive website](#) providing information on how each ordinance was passed. Next up, Montgomery County Commissioners recently announced their intention to adopt an ordinance.

With 30 local laws passed since 1982: Pennsylvania has more municipalities than any other state in the nation to have adopted inclusive nondiscrimination ordinances.

Nearly half of the nondiscrimination ordinances in Pennsylvania were adopted in the past three years. Approximately one-third (32%) [US Census 2010] of the state’s population live in these 30 municipalities. **Two-thirds of Pennsylvanians live in communities in which it is perfectly legal to deny a gay person a job, kick at lesbian out of her home, or deny a transgender person service at a restaurant.**

It is widely expected that PA Rep. Dan Frankel will soon reintroduce HB 300 which would prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, and public accommodations. Since the first Pennsylvania nondiscrimination bill inclusive of sexual orientation was introduced in 1976, 13 bills have been introduced – none of which have been brought to a floor vote. More information on the history of nondiscrimination advocacy in the state legislature is on the SARA PA website.

Until the Pennsylvania General Assembly takes action to join the 16 states which prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, local community advocates will continue to self-sufficiently lead efforts to adopt nondiscrimination laws.