



Eight new laws advancing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality and protections go into effect in California

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The **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** applauds Equality California (EQCA) and legislative leaders for the record number of pro-equality laws taking effect this month in California.

"With eight pro-equality laws going into effect this month, California stands head and shoulders above any other state in treating all its people equally under the law," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "Thanks to the extraordinary leadership of Geoff Kors and Equality California and lesbian and gay members of the Legislature, Senators Sheila Kuehl, Christine Kehoe and Carole Migden and Assemblymember Mark Leno, tens of thousands will now have greater access to health care, discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in housing and state services will be prohibited, and the use of the pernicious, homosexual panic defense will be limited, among many other advances."

One of the most sweeping measures is the Equal Benefits in State Contracting law, which prohibits the state from contracting with businesses that do not offer equal benefits to employees with domestic partners on the same terms that benefits are offered to employees with spouses. The measure, authored by former Assemblymember and current Sen. Christine Kehoe, D-San Diego, passed during the 2003 and 2004 legislative session and took effect on Jan. 1. It was modeled after a very successful 1996 equal benefits ordinance enacted in San Francisco.

"We are excited to see this policy become state law," said EQCA Executive Director Geoff Kors, who initiated the idea of enacting an equal benefits policy in San Francisco in the 1990s. "The new law establishes the fair principle of equal pay for equal work, regardless of sexual orientation."

In addition to the equal benefits law, domestic partners in 2007 have the right to prepare their California income tax returns together. Couples can file jointly in 2008, covering the 2007 tax year. Other new laws that went into effect on Jan. 1 reduce courtroom bias against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, expand the state's nondiscrimination protections, and ensure dignity and stability for LGBT seniors.

"These new laws not only provide essential protections for the LGBT community, but they also reiterate California's commitment to treat all people equally under the law," Kors said.

The following pro-equality bills were enacted in California on Jan. 1:

Equal Benefits in State Contracting (2003)

AB 17: Assemblymember Christine Kehoe, D-San Diego

Prohibits the state from contracting with businesses that do not offer equal benefits to employees with domestic partners on the same terms that benefits are offered to employees with spouses.

State Income Tax Equity Act

SB 1827: Sen. Carole Migden, D-San Francisco

Enables registered domestic partners to file joint state income tax returns and have their earned income treated as community property.

Civil Rights Housing Act of 2006

AB 2800: Assemblymember John Laird, D-Santa Cruz

Prohibits discrimination in housing based on race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, disability and sex (including gender identity), marital status, sexual orientation, familial status and source of income.

Older Californians Equality and Protection Act

AB 2920: Assemblymember Mark Leno, D-San Francisco

Ensures that LGBT seniors are adequately served by government services available to older Californians.

Nondiscrimination in State Programs and Activities Act

SB 1441: Sen. Sheila Kuehl, D-Santa Monica

Prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in state-operated programs.

Equality in Prevention and Services for Domestic Abuse Act

AB 2051: Assemblymember Rebecca Cohn, D-Saratoga

Creates a fund to develop and support education and services for LGBT victims of domestic violence.

Gwen Araujo Justice for Victims Act

AB 1160: Assemblymember Sally Lieber, D-San Jose

Creates jury instructions and prosecutor training to limit the use of so-called "panic strategies" to influence criminal trial proceedings.

Code of Fair Campaign Practices

AB 1207: Speaker pro Tem Leland Yee, D-San Francisco

Prohibits the use of negative appeals based on prejudice against LGBT people by candidates who sign the voluntary pledge in the Code of Fair Campaign Practices. (Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed a similar bill in 2005.)