

MYTHBUSTER

When it comes to who LGBT people are and why they need protections from discrimination, we need to separate fact from fiction.

Virginians believe in treating others as they themselves want to be treated. We can all agree that discrimination is wrong, and everyone deserves a safe place to call home. That's why we're calling on our state lawmakers to pass the Virginia Values Act to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Virginians from discrimination in their daily lives.

MYTH: LGBT people are already protected in Virginia.

FACT: Our state's current nondiscrimination protections don't explicitly extend to our LGBT neighbors.

It's surprising to learn that Virginians can still be fired from their jobs, evicted from their homes, and turned away from places like restaurants, shops and even doctor's offices just for being who they are. The best way the General Assembly can ensure that LGBT Virginians are protected from discrimination in their daily lives is to pass clear, enumerated laws that include sexual orientation and gender identity. These protections will send a strong message that Virginia is open for business to all, including LGBT Virginians.

MYTH: Legally protecting transgender people means a man could just "wake up one day" and claim to be a woman, just to be able to access women's facilities.

FACT: Nondiscrimination policies across the country make it clear that gender must be honest and sincere.

There are proven ways to assess that and they are written into the policy. Even more importantly, this nondiscrimination update still means that anyone—transgender or not—who engages in inappropriate or illegal behavior will be arrested and held accountable for their actions.

MYTH: Transgender people will violate modesty norms in locker rooms.

FACT: Transgender people, like all of us, care about privacy and modesty in places like locker rooms, and they do what they can to not draw attention to themselves.

They are members of our workplaces and neighborhoods, and they use the gym and the locker room for the same reasons as everyone else—to get their workout in, and to keep healthy as best they can. When they can't use the locker room that matches the gender they live every day, they're at risk for harassment and assault. According to the most recent study available, more than 1 in 10 of our transgender neighbors have been harassed in spaces like locker rooms. That's heartbreaking, and it's time to change it.

MYTH: This legislation violates religious freedom.

FACT: That's false. Freedom of religion is important to all of us—it's one of our nation's fundamental values.

That freedom is already protected by the First Amendment, and doesn't give any of us the right to impose our beliefs onto others, or to discriminate as business owners. No one should be turned away from a business simply for being who they are. That's why people of faith in our Commonwealth are speaking out in support of these protections for LGBT people because of their deep faith, not in spite of their faith.

MYTH: Virginia isn't ready to pass legal protections for LGBT people.

FACT: Public support for LGBT non-discrimination has been growing at record speeds.

Support for policies that protect LGBT people from discrimination crosses party lines and is on the rise—here in Virginia and across the nation. Recent polling from Mason-Dixon shows a majority of Republicans, Democrats and Independents in Virginia support these protections. For the past six years, the Republican-controlled State Senate has passed legislation to protect LGBT people from discrimination. It's time for the General Assembly to pass bipartisan, common sense nondiscrimination protections for LGBT Virginians.

MYTH: LGBT protections are unprecedented and untested.

FACT: It's reassuring to know that nondiscrimination laws have been around for a long time.

Twenty states and more than 250 towns all across the country have already passed laws protecting their LGBT residents, and there's been no uptick in public safety concerns. It's time to update Virginia's nondiscrimination laws and make Virginia a safe place to call home for everyone.

MYTH: It is strange or bad to be transgender.

FACT: It can be hard to understand what it means to be transgender, especially if you've never met a transgender person.

A transgender person is someone whose sex at birth is different from who they know they are on the inside. For example, a transgender woman is a woman who was born male but has long known her true self to be female, and transitions to live her daily life as the woman she knows herself to be. The American Medical Association and other leading healthcare professionals have demonstrated a consensus recognizing the need for affirming and compassionate care in accordance with transgender people's gender identities, and the harms that discrimination poses to the health and well-being of transgender people.

MYTH: This legislation could be used as cover for misconduct in restrooms and locker rooms.

FACT: We all care about safety, including transgender people, who need to use the restroom just like everyone else.

Harassment is already illegal under Virginia law, and the good news is that updating our nondiscrimination protections absolutely keeps that in place. Anyone who goes into a restroom to harm and harass others can and should be held accountable.

MYTH: Transgender legal protections would require businesses and other public places to spend money to remodel their restrooms to be gender neutral or add restrooms or other sex-segregated facilities.

FACT: Not true. Businesses and public facilities won't have to spend a penny on remodeling or new construction.

Being protected from discrimination simply means customers use the existing facilities that match the gender they live every day. Many businesses are publicly supporting this update because it will attract investment. We all want Virginia to have a competitive economy that attracts the best talent, and updated nondiscrimination protections can help get us there.

MYTH: There aren't enough LGBT people in Virginia to warrant explicit non-discrimination protections.

FACT: It can be surprising to learn that there are thousands of LGBT people living right here in Virginia.

Virginia is home to more than 300,000 LGBT adults and youth. LGBT Virginians are our neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family members, and many are facing discrimination and harassment. No one should be discriminated against just because of who they are. Everyone deserves to be treated with fairness and respect. That's what Virginia values are all about.