



Polls Show Huge Public Support for Gay and Transgender Workplace Protections

Americans Support a Federal Law Protecting Workers from Discrimination

Jeff Krehely May 2011

A new poll from the Center for American Progress shows that the American public strongly supports workplace nondiscrimination protections for gay and transgender people.* This support comes at a time when new research shows just how much discrimination and harassment this population faces on the job.

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research fielded the poll of likely 2012 voters in the first and second weeks of April 2011. Nearly three-fourths of voters (73 percent) support protecting gay and transgender people from workplace discrimination. This support cuts across political party affiliation, with 81 percent of Democrats, 74 percent of independents, and 66 percent of Republicans supporting workplace nondiscrimination laws for gay and transgender people.

Catholic (74 percent support) and senior citizen (61 percent support) voters are also clearly in favor of employment protections for gay and transgender people. Even among voters who identify themselves as feeling generally unfavorable toward gay people, a full 50 percent support workplace nondiscrimination protections for the gay and transgender population.

Since at least the early 1980s, a majority of Americans have supported equal rights and opportunities for gay people in the workplace. Polling questions about transgender workers have only been asked recently. But the CAP poll shows that voters support transgender protections at almost the same rate they support gay protections. Seventy-five percent of likely voters say they favor “protecting gay and lesbian people from discrimination in employment,” while 73 percent say they favor these protections for “gay, lesbian, and *transgender* people.” The responses are essentially identical.

The survey also found that 9 out of 10 voters erroneously think that a federal law is already in place protecting gay and transgender people from workplace discrimination. A similar

* In this column, the term gay is used as an umbrella term for people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

number of voters also did not know whether their state had a gay and transgender workplace discrimination law. These numbers show the huge disconnect between voter perceptions about workplace protections and the realities that gay and transgender people face on the job.

As CAP recently reported, studies show that anywhere from 15 percent to 43 percent of gay people have experienced some form of discrimination and harassment at the workplace. An astonishing 90 percent of transgender people report some form of harassment or mistreatment on the job. Nearly half of transgender people also report experiencing an adverse job outcome because of their gender identity. This includes being passed over for a job (44 percent), getting fired (26 percent), and being denied a promotion (23 percent).

A federal law—such as the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, or ENDA, which has been introduced in both houses of Congress—is needed to bring uniform protections to all American workers, gay or straight, transgender or not. If passed, gay and transgender Americans would have similar workplace protections currently afforded to women, people of color, veterans, seniors, and the disabled.

A confusing patchwork of state and local laws and regulations currently offer some protections to gay and transgender workers. Many of these policies only apply to gay people, while some are inclusive of transgender employees. Even with these policies, however, a federal law such as ENDA is needed to provide full and adequate protections to gay and transgender Americans.

All of our nation's workers deserve to have a fair chance at earning an honest living and supporting themselves and their families. Congress should pass ENDA to make sure that gay and transgender people across the country have a fair shot at success in the workplace.

Policies that create fair workplaces have real, positive impacts on people's lives, and they reflect the best of our country's ideal of granting people equal treatment under the law.

Jeff Krehely is Director of the LGBT Research and Communications Project at the Center for American Progress.