



How the Louisville Pride Foundation – and You – Can Help our LGBTQ+ Community

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The Louisville Pride Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization with a mission to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community and advance equity and representation for all people. Our vision is for Louisville to be a safe and affirming community where every person is empowered to thrive as their true, whole self. We believe that Pride is for everyone, and we work hard to include people who are not always included. We ensure that our events are accessible and family-friendly. Our Board of Directors is 50% people of color and a majority of our leadership identify as transgender, non-binary or gender-nonconforming.

We are best known for the Louisville Pride Festival, a street fair and concert featuring two stages and more than 100 businesses, service providers, artists and exhibitors on Bardstown Road each September. The Festival includes a Wellness Zone, Job Shop, family area and Transgender Community Corner. This year's event is September 17 and is free to the public.

Through our Social Justice Fund, we have raised and disbursed more than \$60,000 in grants to organizations promoting anti-racism, social justice and human dignity. We co-facilitate the Louisville LGBTQ+ Community Response Network, a group that simplifies communication between organizations and shares information and resources to help the community prepare for and respond to challenges. We host a Business and Resource Guide on our website, louisvillepride.com, to help LGBTQ+ people, family, friends and allies find LGBTQ+ friendly businesses and resource providers. And we serve as the fiscal sponsor for the Transgender Wellness Coalition. This group puts on the annual Transgender Wellness Summit, featuring workshops, a vendor fair and a keynote speaker.

This month we're opening the Louisville Pride Center, the first LGBTQ+ community center in Louisville in more than 30 years. This all-ages, accessible and inclusive center will be open to everyone, regardless of their ability to pay, and will host a wide range of activities such as game nights, film screenings, community dinners, book clubs, support groups and classes.

The Center will offer multiple rooms for meetings and events, co-working and office space, networking opportunities, administrative and technical support and professional development opportunities. We'll partner with existing providers to build trust and reduce barriers to accessing critical services, such as mental health counseling, financial coaching, a food pantry, income tax assistance, benefits navigation, legal assistance and wellness checkups. In one of our first events, we're partnering with Dinsmore & Shohl, the University of Louisville Brandeis School of Law and their LAMBDA

Law Caucus to host a Name Change Clinic on June 25th. The Legal Aid Society will also be available on site to offer legal information and assistance with other civil legal issues impacting the trans-community such as access to housing, healthcare and employment.

The Law and the LGBTQ+ Community

When we think of law and the LGBTQ+ community, we often think about landmark civil rights cases like the Supreme Court rulings that overturned sodomy laws or made marriage equality the law of the land. But there are also lots of smaller ways attorneys can help LGBTQ+ people on an individual basis.

- For members of the transgender community, legal assistance can be incredibly helpful during their "legal transition." Social, legal and medical transition are three different but interrelated processes that someone may choose to pursue. Medical transition can include hormone treatment and surgery. Social transition often includes changing one's appearance and dress, using different pronouns and asking friends and family to use a different name. Legal transition means legally changing one's name and changing one's gender marker on their passport and birth certificate. It's possible for someone to socially transition without medically or legally transitioning—the process looks different for everyone, and is shaped by personal goals and desires, one's financial means and access to care.
- In Kentucky, the name change process differs from county to county and can be simple or quite complicated depending on the presiding authority. Many younger transgender people may have strained or non-existent relationships with their parents and may not have older adults they can turn to for assistance and guidance. So, while legal counsel may not strictly be necessary for a name change, it can make a big difference to have an ally at your side while you navigate a potentially hostile bureaucracy. Insurance coverage and access to healthcare for medical transition can present similar obstacles.
- Family law is a subject of particular interest for the LGBTQ+ community. Family planning for LGBTQ+ people will very often involve adoption or surrogacy. These processes are intimidating, expensive and far from intuitive. In both cases, having competent and compassionate advocates makes a big difference.
- Because LGBTQ+ businesses and organizations are sometimes targeted by those who are hostile to equity and inclusion, they are at greater risk of being involved in legal action. Attorneys can help by providing pro bono services to those

organizations and businesses.

- LGBTQ+ people also continue to face harassment and discrimination in public accommodations, housing and employment. Civil rights attorneys will continue to be important allies for many years to come.
- We continue to face attacks at the legislative level, most often targeted against transgender children. While these cynical proposals are never based in fact or rational thinking, it is important for us to be able to counter these attacks with sound legal reasoning and compelling personal narratives. White papers on potential legislation and policy can be an important tool for advocates as we try to educate the public on the real impacts of misguided policy proposals.

When an LGBTQ+ person looks at the legal system, you see a system that was not designed for people like you. As with any marginalized community, members often lack some of the 'participation skills' that more privileged people have. A threatening letter from an attorney can have a more chilling effect on a marginalized person than on a member of the privileged class, who is most likely to know how to respond to such a tactic.

Having access to qualified legal professionals can make a significant impact in increasing equity by helping marginalized people and groups to participate fully and on an equal footing in the public sphere. A compassionate and knowledgeable legal advocate at your side is not just a matter of prudence, it levels the playing field and makes you feel less alone in a hostile world.

Understanding our community will help you provide better service to your LGBTQ+ clients. And a deep cultural competence will ensure you're truly providing your client with help and support instead of being one more obstacle on their journey. Having to constantly educate and re-educate your legal counsel along the way makes an already stressful journey more difficult. On the other hand, having an attorney who "gets it" will make every step of the way a little bit easier.

Mike Slaton, the Louisville Pride Foundation's executive director, worked for Louisville Metro Government for 10 years, in both the Parks Department and the Office of Management and Budget. Slaton helped form the city government's first LGBTQ+ employee resource group before he left. Before working for the city, Slaton was a volunteer and then staff member at the Fairness Campaign, where he was involved in the successful effort to protect school board employees from discrimination based on sexual orientation. ■

