



## INFO REPORT ON THE EQUALITY ACT

**The SPRING Group**

*Summer 2025*

**Prepared for:**

---

**Authors:**

Varun Mukund, SPRING  
Sagar Raghavan, SPRING

**Correspondence:**

[varunpmukund@gmail.com](mailto:varunpmukund@gmail.com)

# 1. Historical Inequality

## 1.1 Demographics & Visibility

The LGBTQ population in the United States has been rapidly expanding, having doubled between 2014 and 2020<sup>1</sup>. Efforts to collect data on LGBTQ+ individuals have historically lagged, concealing the full scope of inequality. This means that much of the discrimination surrounding the LGBTQ+ community could be hidden, and underrepresents the extent to which they are harmed by inequality. From 2008–2012, approximately 3.0% of U.S. adults identified as LGBTQ+, rising to 4.8% by 2014–2018, with youth estimates climbing from 7.3% in 2009 to 14.3% in 2017<sup>2,3</sup>. Limited inclusion in federal surveys before the late 2010s undercounted sexual and gender minorities, weakening baseline understanding of disparities, which hindered the policymaking potential to reduce these disparities.

## 1.2 Mental Health

Decades of research demonstrate that LGBTQ+ individuals experience significantly worse mental health outcomes compared to heterosexual, cisgender peers:

- A meta-analysis shows sexual minorities are about 2.5 times more likely to have a lifetime mental disorder and 2 times more likely to have current mental illness<sup>4</sup>.
- Discrimination is a key driver: among lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults, exposure to bias is linked to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders.
- LGBTQ+ youth facing high parental rejection are over 8 times more likely to attempt suicide, over 6 times more likely to experience serious depression, and more than 3 times more likely to use illegal drugs<sup>5</sup>.
- Transgender and gender-diverse individuals endure high rates of violence, poverty, and associated adverse health outcomes; lifetime experiences of bias-related violence affect 39% of gay men and 15% of transgender people<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Jones, 2025](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Lee, Gamarel, Bryant, Zaller, 2016](#)

<sup>3</sup> [White, Sepúlveda, Patterson, 2020](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Tanni et al., 2024](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Thamrin, 2022](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Baciu, Negussie, Geller, et al., 2017](#)

### 1.3 Academic & Economic Outcomes

Inequalities have similarly manifested in schooling and later financial stability:

- LGBTQ students typically report lower GPAs, higher truancy and dropout rates. In Massachusetts, LGBTQ+ youth were 12 % less likely to earn A/B grades than peers, while widespread harassment (92 % in 2011) contributed to poorer academic outcomes<sup>7</sup>.
- Schools with Gay–Straight Alliances (GSAs) or LGBTQ-inclusive policies show improved outcomes: GSAs correlate with higher GPAs ( $\approx \frac{1}{2}$ -grade boost), increased school belonging, reduced victimization, and lower rates of truancy and suicidal behavior<sup>8</sup>.

### 1.4 Intersectionality & Disparities

Marginalization intensifies at intersections of race, gender identity, and socioeconomic status:

- LGBTQ+ people of color, particularly Black and Latinx individuals, experience compounding challenges: e.g., 30.8 % of Black LGBTQ+ individuals live in poverty—higher than their non-LGBTQ peers (25.3 %)<sup>9</sup>.
- Sexual minority Latinx youth face dual discrimination tied to ethnicity and sexuality, resulting in elevated depressive symptoms<sup>10</sup>.
- Bisexual women specifically face distinct minority stress: anti-bisexual stigma predicts internalized binegativity, identity uncertainty, anxiety, and depression<sup>11</sup>.

### 1.5 Resilience: Support & Policy

Research highlights several structural and community interventions that mitigate harm and help uplift LGBTQ+ communities:

- Supportive school environments with LGBTQ-inclusive policies and GSAs significantly reduce victimization, depression, drug use, and suicide risk among students.

---

<sup>7</sup> [Chan et. al., 2022](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Semprevivo, 2023](#)

<sup>9</sup> [HRC, 2024](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Thamrin et. al., 2021](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Cornell University, n.d.](#)

- A sense of safety, belonging, and access to adult help reduces odds of depression and suicidality. For example, Purdue youth who feel safe or have supportive adults show 40–50% lower odds of these outcomes<sup>12</sup>.
- Laws protecting sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing and education remain uneven—only 19 states had these protections in 2016, leaving many LGBTQ+ individuals without recourse<sup>13</sup>.

## 2. Similar Legislation

### 2.1 Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) S.815<sup>14</sup>

This started as a bill aiming to stop employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. Later, this changed to include gender identity as a part of the protected group. When the bill was originally created, it was passed in the House of Representatives and then died in the Senate. In 2013, a new version with the same idea was created in the Senate but died in the House. What killed the bill was party-line ideology divisions on the inclusion of transgender people.

### 2.2 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act<sup>15</sup>

The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act was created to include, explicitly, sexual orientation and gender identity as a part of the hate crime statutes. The idea was to identify these groups as those who could be discriminated against, and crimes against them could be classified as hate crimes. The act passed in 2009 with bipartisan backing.

### 2.3 Civil Rights Act of 1964 (H.R. 7152)<sup>16</sup>

This landmark bill outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origins throughout employment, access to public programs, and voting access. The act beat out segregation, made way for the voting rights act of 1965 which stopped literacy tests and methods to suppress minorities, and overall laid the groundwork for the initial fight against discrimination across America<sup>17</sup>.

---

<sup>12</sup> [Semprevivo, 2023](#)

<sup>13</sup> [FBSCO, n.d.](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Congress, 2013](#)

<sup>15</sup> [U.S. Department of Justice, 2023](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Mann, 1996](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Library of Congress, n.d.](#)

## 3. The Bill Proper

### 3.1 History

In April 2025, Senator Cory Booker joined Senators Merkley and Baldwin as well as Representative Takano to reintroduce the Equality Act. The amendments proposed explicitly add gender identity and sexual orientation to civil rights protections for employment, housing, public accommodations, credit, education, jury service, and federally funded programs. In 2015, 2017, 2019, and 2021, the same amendments were proposed and shut down.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.2 Key Features

- Defines “sex” as inclusive of sexual orientation, gender identity, sex stereotypes, and pregnancy or childbirth-related medical conditions<sup>19</sup>
- Amends the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Titles II, IV, VI, VII, and IX), the Fair Housing Act, the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, the Jury Selection and Service Act, and several provisions of federal education law to include non-discrimination of those with special sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>20</sup>
- Redefines public services to include transportation services, retail stores, service providers, and online platforms.<sup>21</sup>
- The bill explicitly states that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) cannot be used as a legal defense to justify refusal of services or discrimination against protected groups.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.3 Opposing Viewpoints

Despite the positive potential of the bill, critics point out potential pitfalls should it pass. One such pitfall is the concern over privacy and safety; critics argue that the definition of sexual orientation is too vague. They fear this could lead to issues in accessibility to services cross gender, endangering women<sup>23</sup>. Other critics argue that the bill oversteps; it adds more solutions for the LGBTQ+ community that already has legislation in place

---

<sup>18</sup> [Booker, 2025](#)

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> [Jensen, 2021](#)

to help them, leading to a further pushing of advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community through policy<sup>24</sup>.

## 4. Recommendations & Next Steps

By including new non-discrimination measures for those with sexual orientation or gender identity, the bill protects a large community. Just as past civil rights legislation safeguarded racial minorities, this bill extends similar protections to LGBTQ+ individuals. This group is one of the most vulnerable and historically marginalized communities in the country. While critics have raised concerns about safety and freedoms, these can be addressed through separate regulatory measures that do not compromise the fundamental rights of others. Moreover, the harmful effects of discrimination on LGBTQ+ individuals, such as significantly higher rates of mental health issues, academic struggles, and poverty, underscore the urgent need for legislative action. Potential benefits include narrowing the 250% gap in mental health disparities affecting LGBTQ+ individuals, improving educational outcomes for queer youth, and alleviating poverty through expanded access to housing and employment. Empowering marginalized communities strengthens the overall economy in that individuals who are protected and supported are more likely to thrive in school, participate in the workforce, and contribute meaningfully to national growth.

---

<sup>24</sup> [Religious Freedom Institute, 2021](#)