



**One Voice Can Change the World:
The PFLAG National Policy Guide and Advocacy Toolkit**

2017-2018 Edition

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Introduction to the 2017-2018 Edition

This year's edition of *One Voice Can Change the World* focuses on how you can effect change at the personal, communal, local, state, and federal levels. This guide provides you with tools to stay engaged on critical issues and pieces of legislation, at all stages of advocacy. One such critical tool is your personal stories.

Our advocacy is rooted in a desire to positively change culture. As we work to change or promote policies, we strive to reframe community dialogue and shift perspectives through an appeal to basic human connectedness and dignity. Personal narratives, therefore, are enormously important and impactful in moving fair legislation forward and in opposing anti-LGBTQ bills and resolutions.

While we strive to ground ourselves in shared human experiences, we must recognize the diversity of those experiences among LGBTQ individuals. Gender and sexuality intersect with race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability, religion, and other identities in shaping the lived experiences of LGBTQ individuals. Our advocacy must remain committed to addressing the needs and concerns of these diverse and overlapping communities.

Culture and public opinion is changing positively in many places, but there is still a long fight ahead for many of our issues. It is critically important that PFLAG families do all they can to influence the dialogue and positions of both their elected officials and their communities at large.

If you find something you're reading that you'd like to discuss further, [contact PFLAG National's Director of Advocacy, Policy, and Partnerships, Diego Sanchez](#) for more information or with any questions you might have.

501(c)(3) Advocacy Guidelines

As a 501(c)3 organization, PFLAG and its chapters have some limitations on how they advocate, and some notable restrictions on election issues. **PFLAG is not permitted to endorse or oppose any candidate elected to or seeking election for political office.** This rule encompasses all federal, state, and local candidates, and applies to all PFLAG chapters, as well as PFLAG National.

These are rules you must follow in person, including at PFLAG chapter and coalition events, as well as online, including use of PFLAG email and social media accounts. Violating these rules may result in the denial or revocation of PFLAG's tax-exempt status.

DO:

- **Educate** the public about issues relating to an upcoming election.
- **Attend** candidate forums and town hall meetings.
- **Organize** public forums where ALL candidates are invited and have equal speaking opportunity and coverage.
- **Ask** ALL candidates about LGBT issues.
- **Wear** clothing that supports specific issues, as long as it cannot be linked directly to a political party or candidate.
- **Issue** public statements in favor/opposition of elected officials' positions on LGBTQ issues.

DON'T:

- **Endorse** candidates in person, in writing, or online.
- **Participate** in any political campaigns or conduct campaign outreach at meetings-- no flyers, announcements about campaign events, etc.
- **Invite** a candidate or their staff to a PFLAG meeting to recruit volunteers or give out membership lists.
- **Donate** to any candidate on behalf of your PFLAG chapter.
- **Engage** in partisan discussion at meetings.
- **Wear** clothing/paraphernalia pertaining to or endorsing specific political parties or candidates.
- **Sell** chapter member email lists to campaigns.

If you have questions [contact PFLAG National's Director of Advocacy, Policy, and Partnerships, Diego Sanchez](#).

Advocacy

The fact that so much could be done is what I find most intimidating about advocacy. But start small and grow as you can.

– Jason Willis, member, PFLAG Abingdon

Why You Should Advocate:

- **LGBTQ voices are powerful.** LGBTQ individuals sharing their own stories is a vital part of humanizing and grounding LGBTQ issues—nobody knows your story like you do. Advocacy can also be an incredible opportunity—as long as you are safely out and in a position to do so—to stand up for what directly affects you and your friends.
- **Ally voices are critical.** Allies have a unique voice that can be extremely persuasive when it comes to issues of equality because they won't directly benefit from policy changes or new laws being passed. While ally voices are incredibly important, keep in mind that allies should elevate LGBTQ voices through advocacy, rather than standing in their place. Allies should take cues from LGBTQ-identified advocates, ensuring that the needs and goals of those individuals are always centered.
- **Advocacy is educational.** Through educating others about current LGBTQ issues, we are required to become more aware and learn more ourselves—about our legislative priorities and where our fight is headed; about the communities we live in and the government officials who represent us; and about the processes by which laws and public opinions change.
- **Anyone, anywhere, can be an advocate.** Advocacy doesn't have to be a one-on-one meeting with a Congressman—although lobbying is an important method of advocacy. Advocacy can be simple, everyday steps to promote LGBTQ equality such as starting a casual conversation about equality, sharing your personal story, or promoting upcoming events your PFLAG chapter is hosting.

Engaging In Self Advocacy

Self advocacy is about standing up for a cause that directly affects you. Self advocacy is the most personal, and thus a very effective method of advocacy.

Self advocacy is about drawing from one's personal experience to speak out about important issues. Self advocates are the faces of our community and act as the voices of our issues.

Committing to being a self advocate means refusing to accept business as usual, acknowledging that one's circumstances are not insurmountable, and taking responsibility by working to change the outcomes of those circumstances.

There are three basic components to self advocacy.

- 1) **Identify your own goals.** Start with considering all the nuances of your issue and which changes are most necessary to achieve the progress you would like to see. Identify the people who need to hear your story in order to accomplish the necessary changes—government officials, community leaders, or others.
- 2) **Know your legal rights.** Before you speak out about your issue, know the ways in which your rights have been violated. It's important that you are aware of how you deserve to be treated whether you are bringing your issue to a representative, undertaking a court case, or providing personal testimony. You have the right to be heard and the right to fairness.
- 3) **Communicate your goals and knowledge of your rights to others.** Think about your audience, the points you need to get across, the narrative you want to tell, and the tone that will be most effective in telling it. After knowing your own mission, share with others—legislators, community members, or otherwise—to inspire them and effect change!

Engaging in Individual Advocacy

Individual advocacy involves taking personal steps in support of another person who is directly affected by an issue or on behalf of a cause about which you feel strongly.

As individual advocacy is primarily about supporting other people as allies, PFLAGers who are family members or friends to LGBTQ individuals are likely candidates for this work.

- **Get informed about the issues.** When discussing an issue or bill, know as much as possible about the topic by researching it and talking with other advocates. Always remember: If you are unsure of an answer to a question, acknowledge that you do not know and [reach out to Diego Sanchez](#), who can connect you with helpful and knowledgeable experts and advocates.
- **Talk to LGBTQ people.** Ask respectful questions, knowing that only some might get answered. Read articles and watch videos by LGBTQ people. Understand that each LGBTQ perspective is unique and valuable, and let their voices guide you in your advocacy. For more on allyship, read PFLAG's [guide to being a straight ally](#) and [guide to being a trans ally](#).

- **Remember that every step counts.** While advocacy may seem overwhelming because there is still much work to be done, remind yourself that every small step forward leads to furthered equality for millions of LGBTQ people across the country. Every conversation about why you are wearing a PFLAG pin, or why a transgender work colleague was fired after transitioning, is one more seed planted for potential change.

Sharing your Story

A parent speaking about their child is compelling and hard to ignore. We cannot be afraid to speak frankly, honestly and from the heart. Our stories are our strength.

– Sharon Groh-Wargo, President PFLAG
Cleveland

Sharing your story is often one of the strongest means of building awareness and support, allowing those who may have been opposed to or uninformed about LGBTQ equality to put a face to the issues. While people can dispute policies, they cannot dispute your personal experiences.

Lastly, if you are an LGBTQ individual advocating for your personal rights, do so only if you feel comfortable or are in a safe position to share your story, especially if you are not publicly “out.” Also remember there is no obligation to come out in any area of your life if doing so risks your well-being.

Handling Opposition: Framing Your Words in a Positive Light

The tools previously mentioned—personal stories, constituent rights, and media—are crucial in dealing with opponents of equality. It is important to use positive and articulate language in order to convey your point strongly while maintaining a good public image. Rather than attacking the other side, it may be useful to point out your opponents’ tactics and to frame the debate on your own terms.

Finding ways to relate to those with whom you disagree can make all the difference. When tragedy struck the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, not everyone in the area was on board with LGBTQ rights, but the entire city, and countless other cities, found a sense of unity amidst a diverse demographic. People understood, and found themselves part of, a narrative of shared humanity and shared grief. Orlando reinforced a collective acknowledgement of senseless hate crimes for many who had rarely considered the issues before, and while the horror of the tragedy cannot be expressed enough, response to the event has been marked by a sense of determination and framed as a call to action for many, PFLAG chapters included.

Use Your Story to Emphasize PFLAG's Purpose

Providing a friendly face and insight into the necessity of LGBTQ equality may open the minds of people who had never before considered equality to be a personal matter. PFLAG's strong reputation stems from its many members' powerful and diverse stories. Heated political rhetoric often leads to division, while personal stories that promote equality and justice affect hearts and minds and empower people to join and advocate for the cause.

A Note: Be aware of harsh anti-equality groups

It is unfortunately necessary to be aware of [anti-LGBTQ groups](#) that promote anti-equality rhetoric. [The Southern Poverty Law Center](#), a nonprofit that advocates for civil rights of all people, lists 48 hate groups around the country that work against LGBTQ equality, including the Family Research Council (FRC) and Traditional Values Coalition. Other anti-equality groups often at the forefront of hurtful rhetoric and action include Focus on the Family and Americans for Truth About Homosexuality (AFAH).

If you encounter such a group and feel that they pose a risk to your safety or that of others, do not confront them directly, but rather notify PFLAG National immediately. Dealing with anti-LGBTQ groups underscores the importance of building strong and diverse coalitions in order to justify the need for equality from myriad perspectives. Remember that your efforts and voice help many individuals secure equal rights and combat negativity.

Advocacy Methods: Lobbying

The [Alliance for Justice](#)—an organization committed to strengthening the public interest community's ability to influence public policy and foster the next generation of advocates—reminds us, “Most nonprofits can and should lobby! Lobbying is one subset of advocacy, and includes both direct and grassroots lobbying.”

Direct Lobbying vs. Grassroots Lobbying

Direct lobbying is an attempt to persuade lawmakers to pass or not to pass a bill. It is any direct communication with a legislator or their staff in order to influence current or pending legislation. PFLAG members' visits to legislators and staff on Capitol Hill in Washington DC and the in-district congressional visits members make in their communities are considered direct lobbying.

Grassroots lobbying is encouraging the people who live in a lawmaker's district to exercise their influence on their legislators. For example, when PFLAG National contacts members and

supporters asking them to take action by reaching out to their legislators, it is considered grassroots lobbying on the part of PFLAG National.

Psyching Up: Knowing Why and How Legislators Value PFLAGers' Voices

As a constituent, you are the top priority to your legislators. Legislators value your voice, need your vote, and want your visit to learn what your family needs as we progress forward together toward full equality for LGBTQ people. Remember:

- **You and your legislators are neighbors.** You live in the same state as your U.S. Senators and in the same district as your U.S. Representative. You also have specific State Senators and Representatives/Assemblypersons who rely on your vote and are obliged to listen to your voice, as is true for your Governor. At the city and county levels, this is true, too, for your mayor, city councilors and county commissioners. They and their staff work every day for the well-being of your family and also for your support and vote during election seasons.
- **For legislators, nothing weighs as much as a constituent's request, need, or opinion.** Legislators listen to them, and vote with them in mind. You are the attentive and active voters who are paying attention to your elected officials and holding them accountable. Less than one third of constituents weigh in, so please, speak out!
- **Legislators write bills when families tell them about their needs.** Legislators use constituent stories to explain to their fellow lawmakers why certain bills are needed. Your stories are the motivation and justification for important new legislation.

Know Your Audience

It is essential that PFLAG families meet and talk with every lawmaker, including those who are already supportive on our issues and especially those who are not. Our stories can cement a supportive lawmaker's positive stance, move those who may be on the fence about critical issues towards a more supportive stance, and possibly change the hearts and minds of those who are not convinced that they should act in support of LGBTQ individuals.

If your elected official already supports our issues

- **Thank** them for standing up for LGBTQ rights.
- **Reiterate** how important their support is to you as a constituent.
- **Ask** them to cosponsor legislation that they may already be supporting, if they can. By co-sponsoring a bill, our elected leaders go on record to document their support.

- **Find** out how you can help support their efforts to show them that they are not fighting the good fight alone.

If your elected official is in the “conflicted middle”

- **Emphasize** the real impact their support means to real families in their district(s) and state.
- **Talk** about how support for LGBTQ issues will affect your family and loved ones.
- **Ask** what their specific concerns or hesitations may be about a particular bill, and discuss those concerns.
- **Offer** PFLAG and your chapter as a resource for your elected official and their staff.

If your elected official has expressed opposition to our issues

- **Remember** to have a respectful conversation, keeping lines of communication open. Behave professionally, even if others don’t reciprocate. Be mindful of your language; insults and mockery don’t persuade.
- **Emphasize** how an unfavorable vote on a particular issue will impact your family.
- **Challenge** assumptions that votes for equal rights—not extra or special rights—won’t be popular. Sometimes speaking to the concept of fairness can be very persuasive to a lawmaker on a particular bill even if it is not popular in their district or state.
- **Offer** more information about the issues, and offer PFLAG as a resource.

In-Person Lobbying: A Step-By-Step Plan

1) Find your representative.

While Congress is usually in session from early January until October or November, lawmakers frequently return home to their districts to meet with constituents and discuss important issues. States vary as to when or how long their sessions occur. Check out the State Advocacy Database on our website, which can be found by visiting pflag.org/advocacy-101. PFLAG members should contact their representatives’ in-district offices throughout the year to find out when they may be able to arrange an in-person meeting with the lawmaker or a meeting with a staff member if the lawmaker is unavailable.

Follow these simple steps to contact your federal legislator about a particular bill:

- Find your elected officials and their office information at pflag.org/leglookup and choose the bill for which you wish to advocate. Note that your information remains

private except to the legislator you are reaching so that they can count your contact as one from their constituency.

- Find out your window for influencing legislation: State legislatures have varying session lengths, with some being a year-long process and others presenting a very short window of opportunity to influence legislation. For more information on your state's legislative calendar, visit Project Vote Smart at <https://votesmart.org/>.
- During an election season, it may also be useful to check out the aforementioned PFLAG [Get Out the Vote](#) guide for additional tips and best practices on lobbying and organizing during elections.

2) Make the call.

Once you've found your legislator's information, call their local office, and explain that you would like to meet with the legislator, and why. Be sure to say that you are a constituent, meaning that you live in the lawmaker's home district if a representative or state if a senator. That will likely give you priority consideration on the lawmaker's calendar. Also be prepared to submit an official request for your meeting, either by fax or e-mail.

Keep in mind that you may not receive a meeting with your lawmaker, but may instead be scheduled to speak with staff members. Staff members make critical decisions and advise your congressperson on important issues. Take the meeting seriously and keep in mind that staffers are the eyes and ears of your representative or senator, both at federal and state levels.

3) Do your homework.

Before meeting with your legislator, you should:

- **Identify** three or four PFLAG members who can attend the meeting with you if you would prefer to go in a group.
- **Set** an agenda mapping out which topics you will discuss and who will cover which topics;
- **Plan** on spending two to three minutes on each topic, and be sure to research your lawmaker's record on LGBTQ issues: which measures did they support? How did they vote on issues such as civil rights, judicial nominees, and privacy? Use that information to shape the message you deliver during your meeting. For example, if your representative is a former teacher, consider focusing on safe-schools issues and tell stories about issues your children face in school.

4) Make the visit.

Always be sure to show up early for your appointment, and dress professionally. Your primary spokesperson (see below) should thank the staff members or representative for granting the meeting and for any positive votes and/or support on issues in the past. To make your visit as productive as possible, remember to:

1. **Introduce yourself:** Select one person to be the primary spokesperson for your group. Mention that you are a constituent, and a PFLAGer, as well as any ties to your community.
2. **Introduce the issue:** Raise the topic you are there to discuss and ask about your legislator or their staff's familiarity with the issue.
3. **Talk about the issue:** Have one to two powerful talking points ready about the issue you're addressing. PFLAG National Policy one-pagers have such talking points about legislative priorities. Stick to your agenda (unless the legislator/staffer leads differently) and respect the time given.
4. **Make it personal:** Relate the issue and your ask to a personal experience and a local need. Take photos of your loved ones with you to your meeting to put a real face on what can sometimes be abstract issues for legislators. Use your passion and emotion to your benefit.
5. **Make the ask:** Ask for your elected official to support or oppose the issue, policy, or legislation you have discussed, acknowledging that they may not feel ready to commit to your position yet, but ask that they keep an open mind. If you are speaking to a staffer, know that the staffer may not be able to commit to a policy stance on behalf of your elected official.
6. **Offer to be a resource:** Offer to leave behind materials you have brought with you, such as our policy one-pagers, and, if needed, offer to share further materials after the meeting from home. Be clear that you want to continue a relationship and dialogue with them. If the staffer or legislator asks a question you don't know the answer to, do not try to fake it. Instead, promise to follow up with accurate information and resources.
7. **End on a positive note:** Return to a feel-good talking point that leaves a positive impression and shows appreciation to your elected official or their staff for meeting with you.

5) Follow up and follow through.

Send a thank-you note after your meeting, restating any commitments you made during the course of the meeting and reiterating your requests. If you've promised additional information

for the lawmaker, be sure to include that along with your note. Offer to be a resource for your elected official. Please copy Diego Sanchez, at dsanchez@pflag.org, on your thank-you or follow-up letter, or complete and submit the PFLAG Elected Official Visit Report Form located at pflag.org/advocacy-101.

Lobbying By Phone: A Step-by-Step Plan

Plan to have a call that is fewer than 30 seconds, but prepare for one that might be longer.

1. **Identify** yourself as a constituent at the start of the call, providing your zip code.
2. **State** why you are calling and your position on the issue.
 - a. **Refrain** from using talking points or personal stories, unless the person who answers continues to engage you on the call.
 - b. **Discuss** a live issue such as an upcoming vote or time-sensitive opportunity.
3. **Ask** that your elected official support or oppose the legislation you have discussed.
4. **Commit** to following up if necessary.

Tips

- Take detailed notes during your call.
- Be polite to the person who answers the phone. Insults and mockery don't persuade.
- Keep it brief if you have to leave a voicemail. Call back when you can.
- Participate in coordinated calling efforts when possible, but remember that your individual call counts!

Lobbying by Email and Mail: A Step-by-Step Plan

1. **Format** the address and salutation properly:

*The Honorable [Full Name]
[Room #] [Name of] House Office Building United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
or
The Honorable [Full Name]
[Room #] [Name of] Senate Office Building United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510*

2. **Identify** yourself as a constituent and include your full address, including your zip code, as well as your phone number.
3. **State** why you are writing and your position on the issue.
4. **Discuss** how the issue impacts you or your loved ones by sharing your personal story in your email or letter, but remember to keep it brief.
5. **Ask** that your elected official support or oppose the legislation you have discussed.
6. **Conclude** with how best to reach you.

Tips

- Limit your letter or email to one page and one issue.
- Avoid using too much jargon, and explain any acronyms that you do use.
- Keep emails professional; do not use shorthand or emojis, and be sure to run spell and grammar check.
- If possible, avoid pre-written letters and emails. If you're starting with a pre-written document, add your personal story to it.

Lobbying: Attending Town Halls

Town halls and other local events are a great way to make your voice heard, ask questions of your elected officials, and increase visibility.

Find a Town Hall

Although town hall meetings are open to constituents, some are promoted by direct invitation to certain constituents rather than by public posting. You can contact your elected official to ask them when they will be holding their next town hall, and check their websites to see if they have posted about any upcoming ones.

You can also locate local town halls at <https://townhallproject.com/>. The Town Hall Project website will also locate staff office hours and public and ticketed events with members of Congress in your district/state. All events that are listed on the website are events where you can ask your elected officials policy questions.

Check out these town hall meeting tips from [National Council on Aging](#) and PFLAG National.

During the Town Hall

- **Prepare** thoughtful arguments, specific points, good data, and a clear agenda. Ask short questions that focus on a limited number of issues. Decide in advance if you are okay with talking to media and plan your key messages.
- **Bring** your personal story. Limit your story to about two minutes, explaining why the issue is so important to you personally and how it can make a difference for you and others like you.
- **Go** in groups. Participate with your chapter, coalition partners, or another group. It's hard for a legislator to ignore a mass of like-minded people with the same agenda. Sit separately to distribute support throughout the room.
- **Find** staff members beforehand, and ask if there is a queue to register to ask a question.
- **Speak** respectfully. Don't bring disrespectful signs or stand near people who have them.
- **Hold** your ground. Don't allow the elected official to dodge your question. Maintain a respectful insistence, and never interrupt a speaker, whether a legislator, staffer, or attendee.
- **Remember** all the communities you represent. You can be part of a company, advocacy or social or racial justice group.

After the Town Hall

- **Reinforce** your presence and comments by following up after a town hall meeting with a phone call or email to the office of your elected official. Make sure to thank the organizers of the town hall. Send the legislative assistant one of our policy one pagers to make sure they have information on your issue.
- **Keep** showing up at town hall meetings and displaying interest, and it will be hard for you to be ignored.
- **Share** details about your experience at the town hall with friends, family, and on social media. Do not make any statements supporting or opposing political parties, per 501(c)(3) guidelines.

Advocacy Methods: Chapter Advocacy

It is the goal of every PFLAG chapter to offer a safe and inclusive space for families, allies, and LGBTQ people to find support, resources, and the opportunity to collaborate with like-minded individuals to advocate for full equality. You can make your chapter a vehicle for change on personal, community, and governmental levels by engaging your chapter in advocacy efforts.

Chapter advocacy is a kind of **community advocacy**, which focuses on the shared goals of a group or multiple groups, and happens through different types of collective work.

Here are some ways to kickstart chapter advocacy at home.

- **Organize events to spread awareness about LGBTQ equality.** You can host workshops, service-focused events, and/or invite people to make presentations around a particular issue.
- **Incorporate advocacy into regular meetings.** While you should keep advocacy activities separate from your support groups, you can always include advocacy in your regular chapter meetings by discussing current injustices and recent progress.
- **Engage in grassroots lobbying.** Mobilizing your chapter and coalition members in fighting or supporting a certain piece of legislation is a form of both lobbying and community advocacy. You can encourage or set up coordinated calls to elected officials or have a letter writing event.

There are also basic steps you can take to promote diversity, inclusion, and equality by creating and engaging allies in your community. [Straight for Equality™](#), a program of PFLAG National, is designed to invite, educate, and engage allies. With modules to empower allies in the workplace, healthcare, and faith communities, Straight for Equality can help you create conversations with new and potential allies in your community. It also has program ideas to support local chapters interested in creating ally-focused programming to help create a more diverse and inclusive community. Visit straightforequality.org for more information.

Preparing for Chapter Advocacy: Building Coalitions

Coalitions are groups comprised of multiple organizations with different missions, uniting to achieve a common goal. Typically, these groups share leadership responsibilities and resources, and they agree upon a structure to make decisions.

Tips

- **Research** the coalitions and like-minded groups that exist in your community. If there is not an existing coalition already established, you can create one!
- **Contact** potential partners to explain PFLAG's mission and your interest in joining the broader coalition. Some coalition members may be obvious PFLAG partners, such as state equality organizations; however, there may also be some less-expected allies, such as faith-based organizations, racial or social justice organizations, or immigration organizations.
- **Capitalize** on your existing relationships and organizations, such as your local faith communities, workplaces, or other social justice organizations. Creating a strong and diverse coalition helps to achieve common goals, allows every individual and organization to contribute their unique skills and focuses, and spreads messages of equality far and wide.
- **Celebrate** your groups' commonalities and differences and appreciate the members of all of the organizations involved. Sending thank you notes or hosting a potluck is a good way to celebrate your successes in order to move forward together towards future wins.

It may be useful to send an outreach letter in which you highlight PFLAG's mission and alignment with the other group's mission.

Sample Coalition Outreach Letter

Dear (Name of group or Leader of group),

I am writing on behalf of PFLAG _____. We appreciate your work for LGBTQ equality [highlight group's specific mission] and would like to join forces to achieve our common goal. As a chapter of PFLAG, we strive to promote the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) persons and their families and friends through support, education, and advocacy to end discrimination and secure equal rights.

To effectively realize our goal, we would like to form a coalition between our organizations. Some of our upcoming projects and advocacy actions include _____.

Please let me know at your earliest convenience if you are interested in forming a coalition. We believe that together, we can achieve equality for all.

Thank you,

[Your name], [Your Chapter Leadership Role]

[Signatures of other PFLAG members]

Be sure to choose a strategy that will allow everyone to contribute their unique skills to the goal. Most importantly, be clear, concise, and appreciative when approaching potential coalition members.

Preparing for Chapter Advocacy: Targets, Goals, and Strategy

- **Identify** some of the most pressing needs in your communities. Some examples are LGBTQ youth homelessness and HIV discrimination.
- **Set** an advocacy goal. Do you want to reduce local youth homelessness? Do you want to support comprehensive health education? Do you want to stop the passage of a piece of harmful legislation?
- **Identify** whom you need to reach to effect change.
 - **Primary targets** are the people and institutions who make decisions about the issue about which you advocate. For direct and grassroots lobbying efforts, your primary targets are likely your elected or appointed officials at the local, state, and national level. If you have an awareness-based advocacy goal, your primary targets might be constituents.
 - **Secondary targets** are those that have influence or power over the decision makers. In lobbying efforts, constituents and media outlets are secondary targets.
- **Consider** the tools you have, the tools you lack, and potential barriers or challenges that might arise. This assessment allows you to see your strengths and your weaknesses and provides insight on the best ways to utilize both.
- **Understand** effective tactics. Advocacy efforts intend to inform and/or persuade targets. Pressure tactics and educational tactics are two of the main methods of effecting change in communities and legislatures.
 - **Pressure tactics:** Have all PFLAG and coalition members consistently make calls and write letters to elected officials. Write op-eds to news outlets. Join forces with businesses and faith leaders who can effectively counter claims from anti-equality groups.

- **Educational tactics:** Use meetings, public community forums, and brief fact sheets to inform and empower members to advocate for your cause.
- **Develop** a plan of action. Create a timeline and delegate tasks to members of your chapter and coalition. This strategy does not need to be complex—it may involve creating a fact sheet and creating a distribution plan or sending out an action alert to members. Allow room for flexibility and unexpected changes.

Chapter Advocacy: Organizing an Advocacy Event

Chapters can organize a variety of events, including support meetings, rallies and marches, fundraisers, speaker events and workshops, lobby days, and coalition meetings.

Before the Event

- **Start early.** Begin planning an event and its logistics about a month in advance (or more than a month in advance, depending on the event’s size).
- **Divide and conquer.** Create a committee made up of chapter and coalition members to deal with the various tasks of coordinating.
- **Publicize your event.** Use social media, flyers, posters, emails, newsletters, and local media to let people know about your event. Be sure to include the PFLAG logo on all of your materials.
- **Advertise your event.** Include relevant information about the speaker, the topic, the time, and the location. Be brief but accurate and exact (time, address, directions, web links, etc.), and be sure to provide contact information people can use to get additional information.

After the Event

- **Follow Up.** Write a brief wrap-up story about the event for use in local news and social media. Be sure to write thank-you notes to all who contributed, and a general thank you to all who attended, including information about how the event went (number of attendees, topics covered, funny stories, etc.).
- **Prepare for next time.** Make sure to evaluate what worked and what didn’t. Be honest about successes and difficulties so that you’re prepared for the next great event!

Contacting the Media

Content from Journalist's Resource, The Thompson Writing Program and PFLAG National.

A **media advisory** invites the media to a specific event, such as a news conference or presentation, or an event that may or may not be open to the public. Media advisories are typically sent to a smaller audience 10-to-14 days before the event and then again a day or so before the event as a reminder, or sooner if there are updates, such as newly confirmed VIP attendees.

An **Op-Ed** is a column that represents the opinion of a writer on an issue of relevance to a targeted audience. An op-ed is usually short, has a clearly defined topic and theme, and is in a conversational tone.

A **Letter to the Editor** is written by readers of a newspaper, magazine, or other source, on topics relevant to the publication's audience. Because editors try to publish a variety of viewpoints on a range of topics, letters typically must be brief (e.g. 100-200 words).

Writing an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor

Before writing, check the particular paper's guidelines for submission closely to ensure that you have the opportunity to be published.

Step-By-Step Plan

1. **Start** with a personal anecdote.
2. **Reference** the issue to which you are referring.
3. **Make** your main point in the first or second paragraph.
4. **Begin** to elaborate two—maximum three—supporting points in the paragraphs that follow.
5. **Make** sure your paragraphs are short and contain one main idea each.
6. **Use** facts, statistics, and studies to support your arguments. Use metaphors to relate complex ideas.
7. **Conclude** with a paragraph that draws the piece together and links to your opening anecdote.

Tips

- **Use** short, simple sentences and avoid jargon.

- **Explicitly** support or oppose something.
- **Personalize** the op-ed with an anecdote.
- **Link** the op-ed to a current news story but keep the focus local.

Advocacy Methods: Social Media

Content from Phone2Action, the Graduate School of Political Management at George Washington University, Big Commerce, and PFLAG National.

Social media is a tool through which advocates can engage in and bolster other advocacy efforts. Tweet at your elected official about a specific piece of legislation to lobby from home when you can't meet with them in person. Write a Facebook post encouraging others to call and write their elected officials about a harmful bill for a far-reaching grassroots lobbying effort. Advertise an advocacy-oriented chapter event on Instagram. Share your story on Youtube to educate others about being an LGBTQ individual or ally.

Tips

The following tips can be used on all social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest and more.

- Start posts directed toward your elected official with, "As your constituent..." to give your message more weight.
- Use photos to grab the attention of those scrolling through their Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter feeds.
- Share information about issues and add your own PFLAG spin.
- Create an Event on your Facebook page and invite people to join you and invite their own likeminded friends and colleagues.
- Share photos and videos of your efforts across all social media platforms.
- Give visibility to your coalition partners by sharing their posts.
- Be mindful and polite when posting and refrain from using offensive and derogatory language.

A Word About Hashtags

A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by the symbol # that is used primarily in social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) to identify a keyword or topic of interest and make it

searchable. A trending hashtag is a hashtag that surges suddenly in popularity, and that can be used to get free exposure, so that they show up when people look up the hashtag.

Use trending hashtags when posting on social media to guarantee that your post will be searchable under the hashtag, allowing a large number of people to see your message. You can also use advocacy-focused hashtags like #LGBTQ, #Pride or a legislative number (i.e. #HB2) or state abbreviation so that other interested individuals see your message when they search for the topic.

PFLAG National Legislative Priorities for 2017-2018

PFLAG National prioritizes a number of federal bills each year and updates the priority list regularly. PFLAG also follows a number of bills beyond the initial active priority list, watching for any progress and moving bills to priority status either when action is likely by legislators or when current events move a bill to a higher level of attention and engagement.

The following bills have also been introduced to the 115th Congress. For the latest news regarding pending legislation, be sure to check the PFLAG National Blog at pflag.org/blog, search the federal database for more current legislation at congress.gov, and search your state government's website for relevant local legislation. You can subscribe to our biweekly newsletter Policy Matters at pflag.org/stay-informed.

On our website, at pflag.org/advocacy-101, you will find one-page, easy-to-read, printable versions of each of these bills. When you lobby your elected official in-person, you can give them those legislative one-pagers so they have the information they need to move forward in supporting or opposing the bill at hand. You can also send them to your elected official's legislative assistant after attending a town hall.

[The Equality Act](#)

Bill Number

Reintroduced in the House as [H.R.2282](#) by Rep. David N. Cicilline (RI-1) and in the Senate as [S.1006](#) by Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR)

Purpose of Bill

The Equality Act will amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other federal laws such that LGBTQ people are treated as a protected class under federal law. It will also strengthen and expand protections for those already designated as belonging to a protected class.

Action Request

Ask your Members of Congress to support this bill. If they are not a co-sponsor of the bill, ask them to support it by co-sponsoring. If they are already a cosponsor, be sure to thank them.

Talking Points

- ***The Equality Act will strengthen anti-discrimination protections not just for the LGBTQ community, but for everyone, including women and communities of color.*** The bill will add protections from discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation and gender identity to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and expand the definition of public accommodations. It will bar religious freedom from being used as a defense for discrimination against any protected class.
- ***LGBTQ people deserve to be treated like every other protected class.*** People who are LGBTQ currently lack equal protections regarding employment, public services and spaces, public education, fair housing, credit, and access to jury service. This bill will extend the same rights to LGBTQ Americans that are currently afforded to other protected groups.
- ***The Equality Act will provide full protection from discrimination for all LGBTQ individuals in the U.S.*** Passing the Equality Act will end inconsistencies that vary by geography and ensure that, no matter where an LGBTQ person lives or visits, they enjoy the same protections as all other people.

[The Do No Harm Act](#)

Bill Number

Reintroduced in the House as H.R. 3222 by Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy, III. (MA-4).

Purpose of Bill

The [Do No Harm Act](#) will amend the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA) to limit its use in cases involving discrimination, child labor and abuse, wages and collective bargaining, access to health care, public accommodations, and social services provided through government contract.

Action Request

Ask your Members of Congress to support this bill. If they are not a co-sponsor of the bill, ask them to support it by co-sponsoring. If they are already a cosponsor, be sure to thank them.

Talking Points

- ***The Do No Harm Act will make sure RFRA is used in line with Congress's original intent.*** RFRA was introduced to grant all individuals equal respect and protection under the law by protecting their freedom to worship and believe as they do or will; it was never intended to be used as a license to discriminate against others.
- ***The freedom to worship and the right to live free of discrimination are not mutually exclusive.*** Both of these are core American values that shape our nation, and need to be protected.
- ***This legislation is crucial to the health and wellbeing of LGBTQ individuals and their families.*** The Do No Harm makes sure that employers cannot use RFRA to deny workers wages, engage in child exploitation and abuse, and limit access to health care.

LGBT Data Inclusion Act

Bill Number

Reintroduced in the House as H.R. 3273 by Rep. Raul Grijalva (AZ-3) and in the Senate as S. 1570 by Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI).

Purpose of Bill

The LGBT Data Inclusion Act will require Federal population surveys to collect voluntary, self-disclosed information on sexual orientation in certain surveys, and to establish data standards that require a routine assessment of needed changes in survey methods related to asking such questions.

Action Request

Ask your Members of Congress to support this bill. If they are not a co-sponsor of the bill, ask them to support it by co-sponsoring. If they are already a cosponsor, be sure to thank them.

Talking Points

- ***Data collection about LGBTQ individuals is critical in understanding the issues that impact them.*** We need data from LGBTQ individuals in order to pinpoint the issues they face and come up with solutions.
- ***The LGBT Data Inclusion Act will foster legislation that is beneficial to LGBTQ individuals.*** Good data often serves as the foundation of good legislation; we need numbers to back up the issues that affect LGBTQ individuals every day.
- ***The LGBT Data Inclusion Act does not require anyone to disclose information about their sexual orientation or gender identity if they don't want to.*** Answering these questions is completely voluntary; individuals who refuse to do so cannot be subjected to fines or penalties.
- ***Collected information is confidential and cannot be used against an individual.*** Information collected relating to sexual orientation or gender identity is maintained in accordance with the confidentiality and privacy standards and policies for the protection of individuals applicable to that survey, and cannot be used in a manner that would adversely affect any individual.

[The Safe Schools Improvement Act \(SSIA\)](#)

Bill Number

Reintroduced in the House as [H.R.1957](#) by Rep. Linda T. Sanchez (CA-38).

Purpose of Bill

SSIA will instruct school districts to implement a comprehensive anti-bullying policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity, and will require states to include bullying and harassment data in the surveys conducted statewide to distinguish what needs are unmet in their schools.

Action Request

Ask your Members of Congress to support this bill, especially if they serve on the House Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. If they are not a cosponsor of the bill, ask them to become a co-sponsor.

Talking Points

- ***Bullying and harassment harm children in our nation's schools.*** According to [GLSEN's National School Climate Survey](#), high numbers of LGBT students report regular anti-LGBT behavior along with feeling unsafe at school. Yet only [18 states and the District of Columbia](#) have comprehensive legislation that protects students against anti-LGBTQ bullying and harassment.
- ***Comprehensive anti-bullying and harassment policies work.*** Enumerated (i.e. specifically naming sexual orientation and gender identity or expression) anti-bullying policies are the most effective at addressing anti-LGBTQ and bias-based bullying.
- ***The bill cultivates respect which will create safer schools.*** Research shows that bullying and harassment are serious problems that impede students' academic progress and overall mental health. The bill provides language ensuring that all students have a safe learning environment which helps reduce the nation's growing dropout rate.

[Every Child Deserves a Family Act \(ECDF\)](#)

Bill Number

Reintroduced in the House as [H.R. 2640](#) by Rep. John Lewis (GA-5) and in the Senate as [S. 1303](#) by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY).

Purpose of Bill

ECDF will prohibit any child welfare service provider receiving federal assistance from discriminating against prospective adoptive or foster parents based solely on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status, or based on the sexual orientation or gender identity of the child involved.

Action Request

Ask your Members of Congress to support this bill, especially if they serve on the House Ways & Means Committee or the Senate Finance Committee. If they are not a co-sponsor of the bill, ask them to support it by co-sponsoring. If they are already a cosponsor, be sure to thank them.

Talking Points

- **This bill will increase the number of safe and supportive homes available to children by 2 million.** Enacting the bill will increase adoptions rates as well as provide more stability and decrease risk factors for youth in foster care, yielding an annual cost savings of three to six billion dollars.
- **Many states have policies and practices that adversely impact LGBTQ and unmarried parents.** This lack of uniform protection leaves children vulnerable to the individual biases of agencies and caseworkers and results in children being denied consideration for adoption or foster care.
- **LGBTQ parents are already raising happy, healthy children.** There are over 1 million LGBTQ parents raising children in the U.S. according to recent data. Some states already apply non-discrimination practices in their foster care and adoption practices with great success.

[Repeal Existing Policies that Encourage and Allow Legal HIV Discrimination Act of 2017 \(REPEAL HIV Act\)](#)

Bill Number

Reintroduced to the House as [H.R. 1739](#) by Rep. Barbara Lee (CA-13)

Purpose of Bill

The REPEAL HIV Act will direct the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Department of Defense (DOD) to initiate a national review of federal and state laws and policies, and judicial precedents involving people living with HIV, and then develop and publicly release best practice recommendations for states and establish a monitoring and evaluation system to measure progress.

This bill does not impact the prosecution of individuals who intentionally transmit or attempt to transmit HIV to another individual.

Action Request

Urge your representatives and senators to support and cosponsor this bill, as it will review current laws that may discriminate against those living with HIV/AIDS. Thank your representatives and senators that have already co-sponsored the REPEAL HIV Act.

Talking Points

- ***We need clear and accurate policies on this issue.*** This law recognizes that policies that regarding people living with HIV/AIDS should reflect evidence-based, medically accurate understandings of HIV transmission, health implications, and treatment, and should not place unique or additional burdens on those individuals solely as a result of their HIV status.
- ***This will be a transparent process.*** The review would be headed by the Attorney General, Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Secretary of Defense and all of the results must be shared with Congress and made publicly available.

[Tyler Clementi Higher Education Anti-Harassment Act](#)

Bill Number

Reintroduced in the House as [H.R.2151](#) by Rep. Mark Pocan (WI-2) and in the Senate as [S.954](#) by Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA).

Purpose of Bill

This bill will prohibit the exclusion and discrimination of public school students in federally-assisted educational programs on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. It will also authorize federal departments and agencies to enforce these prohibitions by cutting off funding to education programs found to be violating them.

Action Request

Urge your senators and representatives to become a cosponsor of this bill, especially if they are in the House Committee on Education and the Workforce or the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. If they have already cosponsored it, make sure to thank them.

Talking Points

- ***Schools need to be held accountable.*** This bill motivates schools to tackle discrimination and harassment by authorizing federal departments and agencies to cut off funding to education programs that are found in violation of the legislation.
- ***We need a clear definition of harassment.*** This bill defines harassment as any action that impedes a student's learning process and creates a hostile environment at an institute of higher learning.
- ***Students need to be able to assert their rights.*** This bill allows students to take a violation to court if they are excluded, discriminated against, or harassed.

LGBT Pride Act

Bill Number

Introduced in the House as [H.R.2895](#) by Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney (NY-18).

Purpose of Bill

This bill will improve standards for data collection on the sexual orientation and gender identity of deceased individuals through the National Violent Death Reporting System.

Action Request

Ask your senators and representatives to support and cosponsor this bill if they have not yet done so, especially if they are on the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. Thank your representatives that have already co-sponsored.

Talking Points

- ***LGBTQ people face disproportionately high rates of violence.*** LGBTQ individuals, particularly trans women of color, are especially vulnerable to being the targets of violence, simply because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- ***We need data on the violence faced by LGBTQ people.*** In order to reduce the incidence of violent hate crimes, we need to understand the how often it is happening, to what people, and for what reasons. Collecting data is a critical step in determining how to take steps forward.

[Voices for Veterans Act](#)

Bill Number

Introduced by Rep. Suzan K. DelBene (WA-1) as [H.R.2827](#).

Purpose of Bill

This bill will expand the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans to include LGBTQ veterans.

Action Request

Ask your representatives to support and cosponsor this bill if they have not yet done so, especially if they are part of the House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs.

Talking Points

- ***LGBTQ veterans deserve to be acknowledged and have their voices heard.*** The repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” is still relatively recent, and this bill would give voice to LGBTQ veterans, who have been subject to a suffocating forced silence for decades, giving them a platform to speak about the issues affecting them.
- ***The presence of transgender service members needs to be acknowledged.*** Even though transgender service only recently legalized, this bill’s language recognizes that transgender people were have been serving our country for decades, and that they deserve to be seen and heard.

[Restore Honor to Service Members Act](#)

Bill Number

Introduced in the House as [H.R.2094](#) by Rep. Mark Pocan (WI-2) and in the Senate as [S.1366](#) by Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI).

Purpose of Bill

This bill will direct the Secretary of Defense to review the discharge characterization of former members of the Armed Forces who were discharged because of their sexual orientation, at the request of the service member. It will allow such discharge characterizations, as long as the original discharge was based on “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT), or a similar policy in place prior to the enactment of DADT, to be changed to honorable, if determined to be appropriate. The bill will also ensure that oral historians of each military department review the facts and circumstances surrounding the DADT discharges and receive oral testimony of individuals who personally experienced discrimination.

Action Request

Ask your representatives to support and cosponsor this bill if they have not yet done so, especially if they are part of the House Committee on Armed Services.

Talking Points

- ***LGBTQ veterans discharged under DADT deserve better.*** This bill would correct service member records to reflect honorable service for members who were discharged dishonorably under DADT.
- ***LGBTQ veterans deserve to be acknowledged and have their voices heard.*** It is estimated that 100,000 members of the Armed Forces were discharged from the Armed Forces between World War II and September 2011 because of the sexual orientation of the member. These individuals represent an important part of American history, and their stories must be heard if we are to begin to understand the impact of discrimination in the Armed Forces.

[Stop AIDS in Prison Act](#)

Bill Number

This bill was introduced by Rep. Maxine Waters (CA-43) as [H.R.1882](#).

Purpose of Bill

This bill will direct the Bureau of Prisons to create comprehensive policy to provide HIV testing, treatment, and prevention for inmates in federal prisons and upon reentry into the community, as well as report on the effectiveness of efforts to minimize diseases transmitted through sexual activity and intravenous drug use.

Action Request

Ask your representatives to support and cosponsor this bill if they have not yet done so, especially if they are part of the House Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations.

Talking Points

- ***LGBTQ people are especially vulnerable to HIV and other STIs due to lack of inclusive preventative education.*** This bill provides LGBTQ inmates with preventative education and provides them with treatment and testing for HIV.
- ***Federal prisons should be motivated to preserve the health of their inmates.*** Since this bill requires the Bureau of Prisons to report on the success rate of their testing, treatment, and prevention programs, federal prisons will have extra incentive to fulfill the legislation's requirements.
- ***Inmates are human beings with autonomy.*** This bill gives inmates the right to refuse routine testing, lessening the risk of potential abuse of authority.

[National Statistics on Deadly Force Transparency Act](#)

Bill Number

This bill was introduced in the House as [H.R.630](#) by Rep. Steve Cohen (TN-9).

Purpose of Bill

This bill will require the Attorney General to collect comprehensive, publicly available data from law enforcement agencies in all cases when an officer uses deadly force. Law enforcement agencies will also be required to keep these data records for at least four years. Noncompliant state or local governments will have their federal funding reduced.

Action Request

Urge your Senator or Representative to support and cosponsor this act, especially if they are in the House Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations. Thank them if they have already done so.

Talking Points

- ***LGBTQ people, especially transgender people, have been historically subject to police violence and brutality.*** This bill aims to hold law enforcement agencies accountable for acts of violence and decrease that violence.
- ***Many LGBTQ people are also members of other communities vulnerable to police violence and brutality.*** People of color, low income communities, and immigrant communities are more likely to experience violence from police than their peers.
- ***Law enforcement agencies must gain the trust of minority populations in order to fully protect and serve them.*** By cultivating transparency in law enforcement agencies, this bill will help pinpoint areas where law enforcement agencies can improve.

Resources

Correspondence Samples

Sample Congressional Visit Scheduling Letter

The Honorable [First Name] [Last Name]

Attn: Scheduler

U.S. Senate OR U.S. House of Representatives/State Sen. or House-Assembly/City Council

[Street Address]

[City, State Zip]

Re: Appointment with [insert legislator's name here]

VIA EMAIL/FACSIMILE: [fax number]

Dear Senator/Representative [Last Name]:

I am writing to request a meeting with you in your [Washington, D.C. or name of city where the nearest district office is located] office for [insert date and time or leave time open to meet the legislator's tight schedule].

I, along with members of PFLAG [Chapter Name], the organization representing the parents, families, and friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people in [insert city or state name], would like to discuss upcoming legislation that impacts our LGBTQ loved ones.

I hope that you can accommodate this request, and I will contact your office shortly to schedule this meeting if a response is delayed. In the meantime, you can contact me at [insert phone number] or [insert e-mail] if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[your name]

PFLAG [chapter name]

Sample Legislative Thank-You Letter

*The Honorable [First Name] [Last Name] [(State-District number) for House OR
[(Party abbreviation-State)] for Senate
Attn: Scheduler
U.S. Senate OR U.S. House of Representatives /State Sen. or House-Assembly/City
Council
[Street Address]
[City, State Zip]*

Re: Appointment with [insert legislator's name here]

VIA EMAIL/FACSIMILE: [fax number]

Dear Senator/Representative [Last Name]:

*Thank you for taking the time to meet with me, along with members of PFLAG
[insert chapter name], the organization representing the parents, families and
friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ) people, on [insert date
and time].*

*We appreciate the thoughtful discussion on the rights of our LGBTQ loved ones
living in [insert name of state/district here]. We value your time and attention on
these issues which is of vital concern to our families and many of your other
constituents.*

*We look forward to working with you to help create a more just society for our
LGBTQ loved ones through addressing important civil rights legislation like
[include name of specific legislation if applicable].*

*[Be sure to include any follow-up information if you were asked a question and
unable to answer it during the meeting. If this section is longer than one
paragraph, include it as a one-page attachment, remembering to be brief, clear
and concise in all of your communications.]*

*Thanks again for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me at
any time if I can be helpful to you.*

Sincerely,

[your name]

PFLAG [chapter name]

Note: These and other resources can be found at pflag.org/advocacy-101 .

PFLAG National Trainings

As part of PFLAG's commitment to educating our communities, we offer a wide variety of training programs to help develop skills, promote understanding about key issues, and create engaged advocates for equality everywhere. Check out [PFLAG Academy Online](#) to learn more.

To learn more about trainings from our Straight for Equality program, visit Straight for Equality at straightforequality.org/ContactUs.

PFLAG National Glossary of Terms

Affirmed gender: The gender by which one wishes to be known. This term is often used to replace terms like *new gender* or *chosen gender*, which imply that an individual's gender was not always their gender or that the gender was chosen rather than simply in existence.

Agender: Refers to a person who does not identify with any gender.

Ally: A term used to describe someone who does not identify as LGBTQ but who is supportive of LGBTQ individuals and the community, either personally or as an advocate. Whereas allies to the LGB community typically identify as straight, allies to the transgender community also come from the LGBTQ community. Transgender individuals who identify as straight can be allies to the LGB community as well.

Androgyne: An androgynous individual.

Androgynous: Typically used to describe a person's appearances or clothing as having elements of both femininity and masculinity.

Asexual: Refers to an individual who does not experience romantic or sexual attraction. There is considerable diversity among the asexual community; each asexual person experiences things like relationships, attraction, and arousal somewhat differently. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy or sexual abstinence, which are chosen behaviors, in that asexuality is a sexual orientation that does not necessarily entail either of those behaviors.

Assigned sex: The sex that is assigned to an infant at birth based on the child's visible sex organs, including genitalia and other physical characteristics.

Assigned gender: The gender that is assigned to an infant at birth which is meant to correspond to the child's assigned sex.

Assumed gender: The gender others assume an individual to be based on the sex they are assigned at birth, as well as apparent gender markers such as physical build, voice, clothes, and hair.

Biological sex: Refers to anatomical, physiological, genetic, or physical attributes that determine if a person is male, female, or intersex. These include genitalia, gonads, hormone levels, hormone receptors, chromosomes, genes, and secondary sex characteristics. Sex is often confused or interchanged with gender, which involves personal identity and social factors, and is not determined by biological sex.

Bisexual: Refers to an individual who has the capacity for attraction—sexually, romantically, emotionally, or otherwise—to people with the same, and to people with a different, gender and/or gender identity as themselves. People who identify as bisexual need not have had equal experience- or equal levels of attraction- with people across genders, nor any experience at all: it is merely attraction and self-identification that determine orientation. Bisexuality, as it is frequently used today, can act as an umbrella term that encapsulates many identities such as pansexual. Sometimes referred to as *bi* or *bi+*.

Cisgender: Refers to an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Closeted: Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Coming out: For most people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, the process of self-acceptance that continues throughout one's life, and the sharing of the information with others. Sometimes referred to as *disclosing* by the transgender community. Individuals often establish a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender/gender-nonconforming identity within themselves first, and then might choose to reveal it to others. Coming out can also apply to the family and friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender youth or adults when they reveal to others their connection to an LGBTQ person or the community. There are many different degrees of being out: Some may be out to friends only, some may be out publicly, and some may be out only to themselves. It's important to remember that coming out is an incredibly personal and transformative experience. Not everyone is in the same place when it comes to being out, and it is critical to respect where each person is in that process of self-identification. It is up to each person, individually, to decide if and when to come out or disclose.

Disclosure: A word that some people use to describe the act or process of revealing one's transgender or gender nonconforming identity to another person in a specific instance. Some find the term offensive, implying the need to disclose something shameful, and prefer to use the term *coming out*, whereas others find *coming out* offensive, and prefer to use *disclosure*.

Gay: The adjective used to describe people who are emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, *lesbian* is often a preferred term for women, though many women use the term *gay* to describe themselves. People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction and self-identification that determine orientation.

Gender: A set of social, psychological, and/or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual as man, woman, a mixture of both, or neither.

Gender-affirming surgery (GAS): Surgical procedures that can help people adjust their bodies to more closely match their innate or internal gender identity. Not every transgender person will desire or have resources for surgery. This term should be used in place of the older and often offensive term *sex change*. Also sometimes referred to as *sexual reassignment surgery* (or *SRS*), *genital reconstruction surgery*, or *medical transition*.

Gender binary: The concept that there are only two genders, man and woman, and that everyone must be one or the other. Also implies the assumption that gender is biologically determined.

Gender expansive: An umbrella term sometimes used to describe children and youth that expand notions of gender expression and identity beyond what is perceived as the expected gender norms for their society or context. Some gender-expansive individuals identify with being either a boy or a girl, some identify as neither, and others identify as a mix of both. Gender-expansive people feel that they exist psychologically between genders, as on a spectrum, or beyond the notion of the man/woman binary paradigm, and sometimes prefer using gender-neutral pronouns (see *Preferred Gender Pronouns*). They may or may not be comfortable with their bodies as they are, regardless of how they express their gender.

Gender expression: The manner in which a person communicates about gender to others through external means such as clothing, appearance, or mannerisms. This communication may be conscious or subconscious and may or may not reflect their gender identity or sexual orientation. While most people's understandings of gender expressions relate to masculinity and femininity, there are countless combinations that may incorporate both masculine and feminine expressions—or neither—through androgynous expressions. The important thing to recognize is that an individual's gender expression does not automatically imply one's gender identity.

Gender identity: One's deeply held core sense of being a girl/woman, boy/man, some of both, or neither. One's gender identity does not always correspond to biological sex. Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced as early as 18 months old.

Gender neutral: Not gendered. Can refer to language (including pronouns), spaces (like bathrooms), or identities (being genderqueer, for example).

Gender nonconforming: A term (considered by some to be outdated) used to describe those who view their gender identity as one of many possible genders beyond strictly man or woman. More current terms include *gender expansive*, *differently gendered*, *gender creative*, *gender variant*, *genderqueer*, *nonbinary*, *agender*, *gender fluid*, *gender neutral*, *bigender*, *androgynous*, or *gender diverse*. PFLAG National uses the term gender expansive.

Genderqueer: Refers to individuals who identify as a combination of man and woman, neither man or woman, or both man and woman. Is sometimes used as an umbrella term in much the same way that the term ‘*queer*’ is used, but only referring to gender, and thus should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as genderqueer.

Gender socialization: The process by which individual one is taught how they should behave as a boy or as a girl. Parents, teachers, peers, media, and books are some of the many agents of gender socialization.

Gender spectrum: The concept that gender exists beyond a simple man/woman binary model, but instead exists on a continuum. Some people fall towards more masculine or more feminine aspects, some people move fluidly along the spectrum, and some identify off the spectrum entirely.

Gender variant: A term, often used by the medical community, to describe children, youth, and some individuals who dress, behave, or express themselves in a way that does not conform to dominant gender norms. (See *gender nonconforming*.) People outside the medical community tend to avoid this term because they feel it suggests these identities are abnormal, preferring terms such as *gender expansive* and *gender creative*.

Homophobia: An aversion to lesbian or gay people that often manifests itself in the form of prejudice and bias. Similarly, *biphobia* is an aversion people who are bisexual, and *transphobia* is an aversion to people who are transgender. *Homophobic*, *biphobic*, and *transphobic* are the related adjectives. Collectively, these attitudes are referred to as *anti-LGBTQ bias*.

Homosexual: An outdated clinical term often considered derogatory and offensive, as opposed to the generally preferred terms, *gay*, *lesbian*, or *queer*.

Intersex/differences of sexual development (DSD): Refers to individuals born with ambiguous genitalia or bodies that appear neither typically male nor female, often arising from chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. Medical professionals often assign a gender to the individual and proceeded to perform surgeries to ‘align’ their physical appearance with typical male or female sex characteristics beginning in infancy and often continuing into

adolescence, before a child is able to give informed consent. The Intersex Society of North America opposes this practice of genital mutilation on infants and children. Formerly the medical terms *hermaphrodite* and *pseudo-hermaphrodite* were used; these terms are now considered neither acceptable nor scientifically accurate.

Latinx: a gender-expansive term used to be more inclusive of all genders than the binary terms *Latino* or *Latina* permit, as these are terms of identity found in Spanish, a gendered language.

Lesbian: Refers to a woman who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

LGBTQ: An acronym that collectively refers to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. It is sometimes stated as *LGBT* (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender), *GLBT* (gay, lesbian, bi, and transgender). The addition of the *Q* is a more recently preferred version of the acronym as cultural opinions of the term *queer* focus increasingly on its positive, reclaimed definition, which recognizes more fluid identities; and as a move towards greater inclusivity for gender expansive people. The *Q* can also stand for *questioning*, referring to those who are still exploring their own sexuality and/or gender. Occasionally, the acronym is also stated as *LGBTQA* to include people who are asexual, *LGBTI*, with the *I* representing intersex, or *LGBTQ+* or *LGBTQIA* to represent all of the above.

Lifestyle: A negative term often incorrectly used to describe the lives of people who are LGBTQ. The term is disliked because it implies that being LGBTQ is a choice.

Misgender: To refer to someone, especially a transgender or gender-expansive person, using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, which does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify.

Nonbinary: Refers to individuals who identify as neither man or woman, both man and woman, or a combination of man or woman. It is an identity term which some use exclusively, while others may use it interchangeably with terms like *genderqueer*, *gender creative*, *gender nonconforming*, *gender diverse*, or *gender expansive*. Individuals who identify as nonbinary may understand the identity as falling under the transgender umbrella, and may thus identify as transgender. Sometimes abbreviated as *NB*.

Out: Generally describes people who openly self-identify as LGBTQ in their private, public, and/or professional lives. Sometimes, individuals are outed by others who they may have already come out to. Outing an LGBTQ person without their consent is disrespectful and potentially dangerous for the LGBTQ individual. Some people who are transgender prefer to use the term *disclose* (defined above).

Pansexual: Refers to a person whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to people of all genders and biological sexes. People who are pansexual need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction and self-identification that determines the orientation. Often included under the umbrella of bisexuality.

Preferred Gender Pronouns: A preferred gender pronoun, or PGP—sometimes called *proper gender pronoun*—is the pronoun or set of pronouns that an individual personally uses and would like others to use when talking to or about that individual. In English, the singular pronouns that we use most frequently are gendered, so some individuals may prefer that you use gender neutral or gender-inclusive pronouns when talking to or about them. In English, individual use *they* and *their* as gender-neutral singular pronouns. Others use *ze* (sometimes spelled *zie*) and *hir* or the pronouns *xe* and *xer*.

Queer: A term used by some people—particularly youth—to describe themselves and/or their community. Reclaimed from its earlier negative use, the term is valued by some for its defiance, by some because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay, *queer* is still sometimes disliked within the LGBTQ community. Due to its varying meanings, this word should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as queer (i.e. “My cousin identifies as queer”).

Questioning: Describes those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof.

Same-Gender Loving: A term sometimes used by some members of the African-American/Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation (gay/bisexual) without relying on terms and symbols of European descent.

Sex: Refers to anatomical, physiological, genetic, or physical attributes that define if a person is male, female, or intersex. These include both primary and secondary sex characteristics, including genitalia, gonads, hormone levels, hormone receptors, chromosomes, and genes. Sex is often conflated or interchanged with gender, which is more social than biological, though there is some overlap.

Sexual orientation: Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. While sexual behavior involves the choices one makes in acting on one’s sexual orientation, sexual orientation is part of the human condition. One’s sexual activity does not define one’s sexual orientation; typically, it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

Stealth: A term used to describe transgender or gender-expansive individuals who do not disclose their transgender or gender-expansive status in their public or private lives (or certain aspects of their public and private lives). The term is increasingly considered offensive by some

as it implies an element of deception. The phrase maintaining privacy is often used instead, though some individuals use both terms interchangeably.

Transgender: Often shortened to *trans*. A term describing a person's gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Other terms commonly used are *female to male* (or *FTM*), *male to female* (or *MTF*), *assigned male at birth* (or *AMAB*), *assigned female at birth* (or *AFAB*), *genderqueer*, and *gender expansive*. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity. This word is also used as a broad umbrella term to describe those who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression. Like any umbrella term, many different groups of people with different histories and experiences are often included within the greater transgender community—such groups include, but are certainly not limited to, people who identify as transsexual, genderqueer, gender variant, gender diverse, and androgynous.

Transition: A term sometimes used to refer to the process—social, legal, and/or medical—one goes through to discover and/or affirm one's gender identity. This may, but does not always, include taking hormones; having surgeries; and changing names, pronouns, identification documents, and more. Many individuals choose not to or are unable to transition for a wide range of reasons both within and beyond their control. The validity of an individual's gender identity does not depend on any social, legal, and/or medical transition; the self-identification itself is what validates the gender identity.

Transsexual: A less frequently used—and sometimes misunderstood—term (considered by some to be outdated or possibly offensive, and others to be uniquely applicable to them) which refers to people who use (or consider using) medical interventions such as hormone therapy or gender-affirming surgeries (GAS), also called *sex reassignment surgery (SRS)* (or a combination of the two) or pursue medical interventions as part of the process of expressing their gender. Some people who identify as transsexual do not identify as transgender and vice versa.

About PFLAG

Founded in 1972 with the simple act of a mother publicly supporting her gay son, PFLAG is the nation's oldest and largest organization uniting families and allies with people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ). PFLAG is committed to advancing equality through its mission of support, education, and advocacy. PFLAG has 400 chapters and 200,000 supporters crossing multiple generations of American families in major urban centers, small cities, and rural areas in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. This vast grassroots network is cultivated, resourced, and serviced by PFLAG National, located in Washington, D.C., the National Board of Directors and 13 volunteer Regional Directors.

Contact Us

As always, [PFLAG National staff and Regional Directors](#) are here to answer questions, give you important information on issues, and provide insight on how to have the most effective meeting possible with your elected leaders. Visit pflag.org/staff for a full list of PFLAG National staff, or to find the volunteer Regional Director for your area.

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