



**For Immediate Release**

March 31, 2015

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## Equality Means Business for Housing Providers

*Housing Opportunities Should Be Based on Qualifications not Orientation.*

RICHMOND, VA - To celebrate fair housing month in April, Equality Virginia and Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) are encouraging housing professionals and companies to join the new multistate campaign “Equality Means Business” designed to showcase businesses that know how vital LGBT customers and employees are to their success in a modern economy.

Joining this free campaign is simple. Realtors, builders, mortgage brokers, rental managements companies, home insurance businesses, and other housing professionals complete the membership form at [www.virginiafairness.org/equality-means-business](http://www.virginiafairness.org/equality-means-business) which guarantees that their LGBT employees and clients will not be denied employment or service because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Participating individuals and businesses will be listed in the Equality Means Business online directory and will receive marketing materials that will signal their support of inclusiveness.



James Parrish, executive director of Equality Virginia said, “Businesses that welcome LGBT customers and clients and take a stand for workplace non-discrimination deserve to be recognized for moving Virginia, the region, and indeed the whole country in the right direction.”

Heather Crislip, president and CEO of HOME stated that, “Housing Providers are often the first contact that families have with their new community. It is vital for the housing industry to not discriminate in order to create diverse and thriving communities that are welcoming to all individuals. Housing opportunities should be based on someone’s ability to qualify, not on their sexual orientation or gender identity.”

In 2014, HOME conducted a study into the prevalence of housing discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in the Richmond rental market. HOME's research showed a 31% rate of differential treatment by which same-sex couples were treated worse than equally-qualified different-sex couples in their search for housing. To read the findings, read this report, [Housing Discrimination Against Same Sex Couples in Virginia](#).

State Delegate Marcus Simon (D-Falls Church) said, "All Virginians should be treated equally in the housing market. This study raises serious doubts as to whether that is true for same-sex couples in Virginia. I look forward to the day when all Virginians are judged on their merits when seeking a place to live and make their home."

This past General Assembly session, the Virginia legislature had the opportunity to expand Virginia fair housing laws to protect sexual orientation and gender identity, joining 22 other states and DC that already outlaw discrimination on these bases. Unfortunately, HB 1454 (Simon, D-Falls Church) and SB 917 (Wexton, D-Leesburg) died early in the session. HJ 648 (Villanueva, R-Virginia Beach) offered a chance for the Housing Commission to study LGBT housing discrimination, but it too was killed in subcommittee.

"It makes no sense to consider someone's sexual orientation or gender identity when deciding whether to rent or sell a home to them," declared Senator Jennifer Wexton (D-Leesburg). She continued, "Unfortunately, we know these considerations are blocking housing for LGBTQ Virginians. I plan to reintroduce legislation in 2016 to outlaw this invidious discrimination. In the meantime, housing providers can show their support for these important rights by joining Equality Means Business."

The "Equality Means Business" campaign allows the housing industry to voice their support for the LGBT community in all housing transactions.

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[Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc.](#) (HOME) was founded in 1971 with its core mission of ensuring equal access to housing for all people. HOME investigates housing discrimination and provides support for discrimination victims. HOME is a HUD-approved housing counseling agency that helps first-time homebuyers and assists homeowners to avoid foreclosure. HOME also conducts policy and research initiatives that expand housing opportunity. More information is online at [HOMEofVA.org](http://HOMEofVA.org). Connect on [Facebook.com/HOMEofVA](https://www.facebook.com/HOMEofVA) or [Twitter @HOMEofVA](https://twitter.com/HOMEofVA)

[Equality Virginia](#) is the leading statewide, non-partisan education, outreach, and advocacy organization seeking equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Virginians. Since 1989, EV has worked to end discrimination, protect families and build safe communities. More information is online at [EqualityVirginia.org](http://EqualityVirginia.org). Connect on [Facebook.com/EqualityVA](https://www.facebook.com/EqualityVA) or [Twitter @EqualityVA](https://twitter.com/EqualityVA).