



Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc.

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Historic Progress Made for Sexual Orientation Protections in Housing

Virginia General Assembly Comes Closer Than Ever

RICHMOND, VA – The 2016 session of the Virginia General Assembly session has come to an end, but not without significant progress for fair housing. This was the first time in nine sessions that a bill adding sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes to the Virginia Fair Housing Law passed a chamber of the Assembly. SB67, patroned by Senator Jennifer Wexton, passed by a wide margin (25 – 15) thanks to bi-partisan support in that body. "I am very happy that this important legislation passed out of the Senate for the first time this year," said Senator Jennifer Wexton.

"The vote in the Senate clearly shows the growing support for changing Virginia fair housing laws to prevent discrimination in housing," stated Heather Crislip, president and CEO of HOME. "We hope in 2017 that sexual orientation and gender identity will no longer be legal factors on which to base a housing decision."

An identical bill (HB300) was introduced by Delegate Marcus Simon and chief co-patron Delegate Scott Taylor in the House. Del. Simon gave an impassioned plea before a House subcommittee, but ultimately members of that group voted to refer the bill to the Virginia Code Commission. When SB67 crossed over to the House, it suffered the same fate. "There is strong bipartisan support for taking a stand against housing discrimination in all forms, including discrimination based on sexual orientation. It is essential to Virginia's branding as we work together to create a new Virginia economy," said Delegate Marcus Simon.

HOME's two-year fair housing testing project [revealed](#) that same-sex couples experienced a 44 percent rate of discrimination as compared to opposite-sex couples when searching for rental housing in Richmond, Hampton Roads, and Northern Virginia. "Ending housing discrimination against gay and transgender Virginians is instrumental for achieving a fully inclusive commonwealth and Equality Virginia will continue to work with HOME and the General Assembly to make these protections a reality," said James Parish, Executive Director of Equality Virginia.

HOME of Virginia will continue to fight for these protections in Virginia. "It is only a matter of time before these protections become Virginia law. Twenty-two other states already have these protections – who you love shouldn't determine your housing choices," said Helen Hardiman, HOME's director of fair housing.

Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc. (HOME), founded in 1971, is a statewide fair housing non-profit. HOME's mission is to ensure equal access to housing for all people. HOME investigates housing discrimination and provides support for discrimination victims. You can learn more about HOME and all of its services at www.HOMEofVA.org.

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