



For Immediate Release

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Virginia Senate Passes Bill to End Housing Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Senator Jennifer Wexton's SB67 Succeeds in Senate 25-15

RICHMOND, VA - For the first time in nine Virginia General Assembly sessions, legislative efforts to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Virginians from housing discrimination was successful in at least one chamber.

Numerous state senators and delegates have introduced similar bills aimed at ending this type of housing discrimination since at least 1994, the furthest back one can search online bill archives of the Virginia Legislative Information System. In all eight preceding sessions (ranging from 1997 to 2015), the bills have failed to report from committee. However, this session, Sen. Jennifer Wexton's SB67 passed the Senate General Laws Committee (10-4) and cleared the full Senate 25-15. The measure now crosses over to the Virginia House of Delegates.

"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 Sen. Wexton. She continued, "I am pleased my colleagues in the Senate finally saw fit to outlaw this invidious discrimination. I hope the House of Delegates follows suit."

In 2014 and 2015, Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia (HOME) conducted a [study](#) into the prevalence of housing discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in the Richmond, Northern Virginia, and Hampton Roads rental markets. Outcomes showed a 44% rate of discrimination against same-sex couples as compared to equally-qualified straight couples in their search for housing.

Supporting housing non-discrimination legislation in Virginia has been paramount for HOME. Heather Crislip, President and CEO of HOME stated that, "Housing opportunities should be based on someone's ability to qualify, not on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The

Virginia Senate's support of SB67 helps us fulfill our mission of ensuring equal access to housing for all Virginians."

State Delegate Marcus Simon has introduced an identical measure in the House of Delegates this session. The fate of his HB300, however, is unclear, as it has not yet been referred to a subcommittee. Del. Simon took the seat previously held by Del. Jim Scott, who tried three times (2006, 2008, 2009) to add these protections into law. Following in those footsteps, Del. Simon said, "All Virginians should be treated equally in the housing market. HOME's 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." Delegate Scott Taylor is also a chief co-patron on HB300.

Delegates David Toscano and Mark Levine have introduced bills that aim to halt discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in housing and other contexts (HBs 913 and 1005, respectively). HOME strongly supports those bills.

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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. Connect on [Facebook.com/HOMEofVA](https://www.facebook.com/HOMEofVA) or Twitter [@HOMEofVA](https://twitter.com/HOMEofVA)