



AMERICAN ATHEISTS

January 29, 2020

The Honorable Rep. David Bulova
Chair, House General Laws Committee
Pocahontas Building
900 E. Main Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Re: SUPPORT for HB 1049, Testimony from American Atheists in support of the Virginia Values Act

Dear Chairperson Bulova and Members of the House General Laws Committee:

American Atheists, on behalf of its nearly 1,500 constituents in Virginia, thanks you for holding a hearing on HB 1049, the Virginia Values Act. This bipartisan legislation would ensure that Virginians are protected against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. We urge the committee to swiftly pass this vital measure to end historical and contemporary patterns of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) Americans.

American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the “wall of separation” between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheism and atheists are accepted as members of our nation’s communities and where casual bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America. American Atheists believes that all Americans should be equally protected under the law, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious beliefs or lack thereof. No individual should be subjected to discrimination and harassment due to the religious beliefs of others.

Most Americans believe that there are already explicit non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people across our country.¹ Unfortunately, they are wrong, and Virginia is one of just 26 states that do not offer these critical protections in areas like employment and housing. And sadly discrimination against LGBTQ people is still rampant. A 2016 report showed that one in

¹ Moore P. (2014). Poll Results: Discrimination. You Gov, June 18, 2014. Available at <https://today.yougov.com/topics/legal/articles-reports/2014/06/18/poll-results-discrimination>.

four LGBTQ people experienced discrimination in the past year.² But Virginia lawmakers now have an opportunity to remedy this injustice by passing the Virginia Values Act.

The non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people provided by HB 1049 are already offered to public sector employees in Virginia and some municipalities, and the Virginia Values Act has bipartisan and popular support. In fact, a broad coalition led by 30 major Virginia employers, as well as advocacy and faith leaders, support a state non-discrimination law over a patchwork of protections for the nearly 300,000 LGBTQ people who call Virginia home. The Virginia Values Act would establish a foundation of basic non-discrimination protections across the state, ensuring that LGBTQ people are protected in areas such as employment, housing, education, public accommodations, and credit while maintaining the existing exemptions for religious entities in Virginia. The bill would make it clear that all residents of Virginia should be treated equally wherever they work, reside, or engage in daily life.

We strongly support the Virginia Values Act, and we urge you to swiftly pass this important bill. If you should have any questions regarding American Atheists' support for HB 1049, please contact me at 908.276.7300 x309 or by email at agill@atheists.org.

Sincerely,



Alison Gill, Esq.
Vice President, Legal and Policy
American Atheists

cc: All Members of the Virginia House General Laws Committee

² Singh A and Durso L. Widespread Discrimination Continues to Shape LGBT People's Lives in Both Subtle and Significant Ways. Center for American Progress, May 2, 2017. Available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/news/2017/05/02/429529/widespread-discrimination-continues-shape-lgbt-peoples-lives-subtle-significant-ways/>.