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**“YOU BELONG HERE”:
CELEBRATING PRIDE WITH MESSAGES OF ACCEPTANCE, INCLUSION
U.S. Senator Bob Casey visits Chambersburg to hear from
local residents about the Welcoming Project and LGBTQ+ issues**

FRANKLIN COUNTY, PA. — Throughout the month of June, the [Franklin County Coalition for Progress](#) (FCCP) is engaging the community to celebrate Pride month through the [Franklin County Welcoming Project](#), an awareness and acceptance campaign to increase visibility of LGBTQ+ people. Through its program, [Pride Franklin County](#), the Welcoming Project is spreading positive messages of belonging and love across local neighborhoods to convey the message that all are welcome here.

“Our aim with the Welcoming Project is to help make LGBTQ+ community members know they belong here in Franklin County,” said Noel Purdy, president of FCCP. “They are seen and accepted for who they are. They have a place in our community. They are loved.”

The campaign has sparked many conversations between neighbors, co-workers, and community leaders, including one with U.S. Senator Bob Casey (D-PA). The morning of Friday, June 17, Sen. Casey made a trip to Chambersburg for Pride month to meet with a small group of business owners and organizational leaders to hear more about how the community is responding following the [repeal of a local LGBTQ+ inclusive non-discrimination ordinance](#) (NDO) in January 2022.

“After the appalling acts of the city council earlier this year, many small businesses here in Chambersburg stepped up and rallied around the LGBTQ+ community, going out of their way to stand up for what’s right. I was grateful to have the opportunity to meet with them and I look forward to working with this community to make further strides towards progress for our LGBTQ+ neighbors. In Congress, I will continue to push for the Equality Act, a bill that would enshrine protections for the LGBTQ+ community into federal law, and ensure that no one in this country faces discrimination simply for being who they are or for whom they love,” said Sen. Casey.

In January 2022, Chambersburg garnered national attention when it made history as the first municipality in Pennsylvania to eliminate an LGBTQ+ inclusive NDO. FCCP immediately responded to demonstrate support for LGBTQ+ citizens by attending local events, distributing rainbow masks and flags, and encouraging business to participate in the Welcoming Project.

“It was powerful for us from the LGBTQ+ community to see so many allies stepping up and supporting us [after the NDO was repealed],” Wes Fugate, president of Wilson College, explained to Sen. Casey during his visit. “As an employer, my biggest concern with the ordinance repeal is recruiting people to work here. With two job postings for every one job seeker in Franklin County, we need to be a welcoming community for all in order to recruit the workforce we need.”

Joining Fugate and Purdy in the conversation with Sen. Casey was LaVan Gray from GearHousing Brewing Co, Amer Chaudhry from Falafel Shack, Kendra Matusiak from REmix Design, and Nathan Strayer from Pride Franklin County.

“It is important for businesses to speak up because community members interact with [small business owners] more often than with Borough council members, so it’s essential to hear from us as leaders in the community,” Matusiak told Sen. Casey.

Gray voiced similar sentiments, saying, “When we were starting our business we always knew that, whatever we did, everyone from the community would be welcome here. Our space would act as a gathering place for *all* in the community. And it came to a point [when the NDO was likely to be rescinded] where a red line was drawn and you couldn’t remain neutral anymore. You either had to speak up for *all* in our community, or you would be seen as against it.”

Both REmix and GearHouse joined the Franklin County Welcoming Project immediately after the NDO was repealed in January. The Welcoming Project was launched in June 2021 as an initiative to encourage businesses, health care providers, organizations, and congregations to display welcoming signs to make LGBTQ+ individuals and allies feel welcomed as patrons. By signing a pledge, a participating business or organization receives free decals to display at their entrances. The decal demonstrates the establishment as a diverse, inclusive, accepting, welcoming, and safe space for all.

After the NDO was repealed there was a surge in Welcoming Project pledges, more than doubling the number of businesses and organizations that signed on.

In preparation for Pride month in June, FCCP worked on a multi-media campaign to continue demonstrating support for the LGBTQ+ community in the wake of the NDO repeal, while also further growing participation in the Welcoming Project.

The campaign launched at the beginning of June with billboards, radio advertisements, and social media posts. Over the next two weeks, the campaign sought feedback from local business owners, community leaders, and residents about why supporting the LGBTQ+ community is important to them. These quotes are now being used in campaign messaging for the remainder of the month, including a direct mailer to nearly 3,500 businesses in Franklin County.

“Living in an area where the LGBTQ+ community hasn’t been as visible, you walk around not always knowing where you are welcome or where is a safe place to go,” said Nathan Strayer, co-chair of Pride Franklin County. “My friends and I would often drive to other towns to be ourselves without worrying if we would be accepted. The visibility that the Welcoming Project has brought to the area has definitely increased the comfort of being able to go to businesses in our own community - a community we love - to be just ourselves and live our truth.”

The Welcoming Project includes 125 businesses and organizations, and counting. They are listed on Pride Franklin County’s website at pridefranklincounty.org/allies. Establishments who want to take the pledge to be a welcoming, safe space for all can do so at pridefranklincounty.org/fc-welcoming-project.

In addition to the Welcoming Project, Pride Franklin County has a series of events planned over the next few months to celebrate LGBTQ+ people and their allies in our community. Learn more and get involved at pridefranklincounty.org.

“The Welcoming Project is all about growing a more inclusive community that empowers LGBTQ+ people to be who they are. It’s time we show up and show out. We need to be unapologetically ourselves and invite everyone into our world,” said Strayer.

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ABOUT FRANKLIN COUNTY COALITION FOR PROGRESS

Franklin County Coalition for Progress is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization founded in 2017 and run entirely by volunteers. Our mission is to advance social justice and equality for all Franklin County residents. We care about building a community where everyone is accepted and welcomed; a community where differences are valued and seen as strengths and opportunities. www.fccforprogress.org

ABOUT PRIDE FRANKLIN COUNTY

Pride Franklin County strives to increase the visibility of LGBTQ+ people and their contributions to our community, while bringing the LGBTQ+ community and straight allies together to celebrate diversity, acceptance, and respect in Franklin County, Pennsylvania. Pride FC is a program of the Franklin County Coalition for Progress. www.pridefranklincounty.org