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LGBTQ+ RIGHTS AT RISK
Chambersburg likely to repeal LGBTQ+ law,
becoming first in Pennsylvania history

Topic is on the agenda at town council public meeting on January 24, 2022

CHAMBERSBURG, PA - Chambersburg, a small-town community in rural south central Pennsylvania, is facing the likely removal of a [LGBTQ+ inclusive local non-discrimination ordinance](#) (NDO) and Human Relations Commission at the Borough Council meeting on Monday, January 24, 2022. **The Borough of Chambersburg would be the first LGBTQ-inclusive law to be revoked in state history.**

Local leaders, residents, allies, and organizations are rallying around the community, including local grassroots organization, [Franklin County Coalition for Progress](#). The Coalition coordinated advocacy efforts last year in support of forming an exploratory committee to investigate adopting a local NDO in Chambersburg. An ordinance was passed and signed into law on October 11, 2021.

Now, just three months later, the NDO is at risk of being repealed.

“To say the situation we’re in is an overwhelming disappointment would be an understatement,” explained Noel Purdy, president of the Coalition. “When Borough Council passed the NDO last fall it was a huge relief and celebration for our local LGBTQ+ community and advocates. LGBTQ+ residents finally felt like they were seen and their voices were heard. To have Council immediately turn around in an effort to repeal the ordinance has many supporters feeling, understandably, deflated. The only thing our LGBTQ+ neighbors are asking for is equal rights - the same protections from discrimination guaranteed to other groups.”

By adopting a local LGBTQ+-inclusive NDO, Chambersburg Borough filled gaps existing in Pennsylvania state law regarding protections from discrimination in matters of employment, housing, and public accommodation. Missing from the protected classes in the PA Human Relations Act of 1955 are: sex assigned at birth, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, gender transition, and transgender. While guidance from the PA Human Relations Commission issued in August 2018 interprets "sex" in the law to include sexual orientation and gender identity, these protections are not codified and could go away at any time.

Pennsylvania is the only state in the northeast that does not have statewide protections for LGBTQ+ people.

Without the local NDO, LGBTQ+ individuals in Chambersburg are not guaranteed protections from discrimination.

To help provide education around the issue, local advocates reached out to the [Pennsylvania Youth Congress](#). The organization hosted a Virtual Town Hall on Friday, January 21 to address the role of human relations commissions in small town communities, like Chambersburg.

“We urge the current Council members to do their due diligence and devote the time and attention to this deeply impactful community issue,” said Preston Heldibridle, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Youth Congress. “There is much important information to be discussed that cannot be done with a rushed repeal. The people of Chambersburg are counting on their elected officials to rely on facts and not bend for heated politics of the moment.”

The Pennsylvania Youth Congress held a press conference the day prior to announce the town hall, featuring Chambersburg community leaders and allies expressing support for the local LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination ordinance. One perspective shared was that of a Chambersburg resident who identifies as queer and [experienced discrimination](#) in housing and employment.

“Some people may not see the need for an NDO act, but this impacts every part of LGBTQ+ people’s lives,” the statement read. “We never know when our identity will affect whether we have a house or a job. We have to take extra precautions to make sure we stay physically safe. The NDO helps ensure that we are treated equally and have a way to report discrimination, so that we are able to enjoy a safe, productive life here in Chambersburg.”

Major regional employers such as WellSpan Health, Giant, and Hershey, as well as the Centre County, Adams County, and Gettysburg chambers of commerce support non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ community members. Regional colleges and universities are also in support, including Wilson College and Penn State University.

“Most of us in the business world right now are trying to find and keep great employees, and this ordinance helps attract folks to work in the borough – it makes good business sense.” said Megan Shreve, CEO of South Central Community Action Program (SCCAP), “Our values and culture say we treat all people with respect and dignity and a safe, welcoming culture is a sound business strategy. We urge the Chambersburg Borough Council to keep the ordinance and send the message that Chambersburg welcomes and protects the rights of all community members.” SCCAP currently employs over 100 local residents.

Chambersburg Borough Council will discuss the local NDO at its public meeting on Monday, January 24 at 7 p.m. at Borough Council Chambers, 100 S. 2nd St., Chambersburg, PA 17201. People can also [attend virtually via Zoom](#).

Anyone interested in raising their voice to protect equal rights is encouraged to [email Borough Council members](#) and attend the meeting.

Learn more about the process of adopting a local NDO in Chambersburg and how to support advocacy efforts at www.fccforprogress.org/protect-equal-rights.

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For Media: [Chambersburg NDO Press Kit](#)