

Write a Letter, Change the World

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### **Letter from a Socially Constructed Jail**

Dear Members of Society:

Today and for every day of my life, I am confined to a jail of social construct. The walls that surround me are infernally bricked with the mortar of social injustice. I am bound by the fear of those that are different for I am different. I am a woman who loves a woman. Society has thus characterized me to be a member of the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) community. I am painfully reminded of my confinement by the hateful stares when I hold the hand of the person I love in public, the expressions of sharp disdain for my marriage by her family, the barring of entry to my preacher father-in-law's funeral, and the words so readily uttered to many of our community yet so damaging, "you are evil, you are a sinner, and you are going to hell." It is from within this confinement that I write today in order to raise awareness to the issues that LGBTQ members including myself still face to this day with hope to inspire change.

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Historically, society consists of a majority and a minority. There are those individuals on the inside falling nicely within the socially constructed lines of acceptance and a minority of those that are labeled as outsiders. Those in the majority lack an understanding and appreciation of the life of the minority and as a result fear that which is unknown and unfamiliar. Laws are established by man to support justice and order based on the opinion of the majority which is in large part influenced by individual fears of anyone society labels as different or acting outside of what is considered socially acceptable. Specifically, the concept of the outsider is illustrated by the horrific battle against injustice black Americans faced in their fight for equal rights and continue to face in modern America. In early America, the social majority labeled blacks as outsiders for the color of their skin, a characteristic society shamefully enforced as deservedly lesser at that time. What did it take to effect change and educate the majority that this societal construct was false and unjust? Direct action by revolutionary leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., best known for advancing civil rights through nonviolence and civil disobedience. It is with Dr. King's influential words in mind from his artfully constructed "Letters from a Birmingham Jail" that I compose this letter. Dr. King explains "any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust." Like Dr. King fighting for justice in racial equality, many civil rights advocates have fought for the advancement of just laws promoting fair treatment of LGBTQ members as equal and not lesser than. In the same way segregation statutes were

overturned as unjust, laws which sustain the inequality of the LGBTQ minority must be overturned.

American social majority has come leaps and bounds towards overturning unjust laws against LGBTQ members from the day Richard Cornish was publicly executed for relations with another man in 1624 in the British Colony of Virginia and the 1777 revision of Virginia law made by Thomas Jefferson to make sodomy, committed by a man or woman, punishable by mutilation rather than death. LGBTQ members have survived hundreds of years of oppression and discrimination for simply being alive. Surviving the beatings of batons at the Stonewall Inn by police, the Harvey Milk assassination, the epidemic of AIDs, Don't Ask Don't Tell and Defense Against the Marriage Act enforcements by former Presidents, thousands have fought and in many cases died for the rights I today possess as a lesbian in America. Many of the majority now believe the battle is over with the 2015 Supreme Court decision that the Constitution guarantees a right to same-sex marriage, but just as the act of abolishing slavery did not end racial injustice, the Supreme Court decision did not end the battle for LGBTQ members seeking equal rights.

Today, members of the LGBTQ minority face discrimination in the workplace, in the establishments they visit, and even with rights to their own children. Social injustice for LGBTQ members is codified in many states and as such many states' statutes do not provide laws protecting LGBTQ members from discrimination in employment and housing based on sexual orientation or gender identity. According to the Movement Advancement Project's 2019 Equality Map of the United States, only forty-eight percent of the LGBTQ population live in states prohibiting employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. This means that over half of the living LGBTQ minority members still face unjust laws discriminating against them without protection. The battle for equality is far from over. We must come together as a society of justice to continue the fight.

Each of us can join the fight for the protection of LGBTQ rights by educating ourselves on the most current legislation and advocating for change by contacting local, state, and federal level public representatives and demanding social justice. Despite significant steps forward, the LGBTQ minority lacks the same rights as other Americans in many states. The Equality Act passed by the House of Representatives in May of 2019 would provide protections for LGBTQ members against discrimination employment, housing, credit, education, public spaces and services, federally funded programs, and jury service. The Equality Act, if adopted into law, would help to eliminate many of the inequalities LGBTQ members face. Many of you may believe that LGBTQ members are already protected, but this is false. I call on the majority, those that may have historically ostracized LGBTQ members, to advocate for your LGBTQ brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers. Let us join together in direct action to defend LGBTQ rights by demanding that our representatives abolish unjust laws and construct new just laws such as The

Equality Act. Urge Congress to finally pass this Act securing the necessary protections for LGBTQ rights in our community.

In writing this letter, I find hope that one day my confinement and that of my LGBTQ sisters and brothers will be obliterated, and from the wreckage and rubble a phoenix of justice for all will rise to soar above protecting us with every beat of wing. Let us together tear down the brick and mortar and break free of this socially constructed jail. For I am certain that together we can achieve equality and all will finally join Dr. King in saying "Free at last, Free at last, Thank God almighty we are free at last."

Sincerely,

A member of the LGBTQ Minority

