HOUSTONIANS VALUE FAIRNESS
THE HOUSTON EQUAL RIGHTS ORDINANCE
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- The Houston Equal Rights Ordinance protects all Houstonians by covering 15 distinct characteristics including race, sex, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, familial status, marital status, military status, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity, religion, pregnancy and genetic information.

- Houston has recently surpassed New York and Los Angeles as the most diverse city in America. With citizens speaking many different languages and practicing under the tenets of many different faiths it is important to make sure everyone is treated equally and fairly. (1)

- Over 80 former elected officials, community and non-profit organizations and more than 70 faith leaders from many different denominations stand in support of the Equal Rights Ordinance including pro-business organizations like the Greater Houston Partnership and the Houston Association of Realtors.

**MYTH vs. FACT**

**MYTH:** Opponents gatherers submitted more than 50,000 signatures in their efforts to repeal HERO.

**FACT:** By their own count, petition gatherers submitted approximately 35,000 signatures, which were invalidated by a Houston jury and a state district Judge due to forgeries.

**MYTH:** Opponents claim that men will be able to assault women in restrooms using HERO as a defense.

**FACT:** Nondiscrimination laws like HERO exist in 18 states and almost 200 municipalities and there are zero cases of an assault taking place using a nondiscrimination ordinance as a defense. ZERO. (2)

**MYTH:** Houstonians do not support the equal rights ordinance.

**FACT:** Equality Texas conducted a city-wide poll regarding Houstonians’ position on nondiscrimination among registered voters revealing that 77.8% of those polled supported an ordinance like HERO. In addition over 4 public hearings at City Council 84% of those who testified did so in support of the ordinance. (3)

**MYTH:** Laws like this do not work in Houston.

**FACT:** The Houston Independent School District (HISD) the largest school district in Texas and the 7th-largest in the country, implemented a comprehensive nondiscrimination policy which extends to both students and facility in 2011 and HISD trustees testified before council that they have had no problems since implementation.

**MYTH:** HERO infringes on religious freedom.

**FACT:** The Houston Equal Rights Ordinance contains exemptions for religious institutions.

Non-discrimination laws are concerned with discriminatory actions, not beliefs. Religious convictions don’t give business owners a legal right to discriminate and courts have repeatedly found that non-discriminations laws regulating commercial activity do not violate free speech or religious liberty.

**Sources**

1.) Kinder Institute at Rice University
Emphasize Shared Values

Work Values: Hard work, earning a living, pride in a job well done.
American Values: Opportunity, freedom, personal responsibility
Personal & Faith Values: Treating others like we want to be treated, not for me to judge, loving thy neighbor

Messages:
- All hardworking people - including those who are gay or transgender - should be treated fairly and equally by the laws of our city and should have the opportunity to earn a living to provide for themselves and their family. Nobody should have to live in fear of being fired for reasons that have nothing to do with their job performance.
- Protecting people from discrimination, including people who are gay or transgender, is about treating others as we want to be treated. It’s not for me to judge. Even though we may have different beliefs, what is most important is focusing on what we have in common - taking pride in our work, respecting coworkers and serving customers and getting the job done.

Explain Why Nondiscrimination Protections Are Important and Needed

Focus on Updating the Law
Messages:
- Updating the law will help ensure that all people in our city have the opportunity to be judged on their job performance and qualifications, nothing more, nothing less.

Establish the Lack of Legal Protections
Messages:
- I believe that all people should be treated fairly and equally. That is why it is so surprising and shocking to realize that in this day and age, it is actually still legal under our state’s law to fire a hardworking employee, deny them an apartment, deny them service in a restaurant, and otherwise discriminate against people simply because they’re gay or transgender.

Talk About Nondiscrimination in Ways that Increase Support
Messages:
- Changing the law won’t end all unfair treatment overnight. But it provides one more tool to ensure that all people, including gay and transgender people, who want to work hard and who do their jobs well are treated fairly and equally, and judged based on their job performance.

Things to Avoid
- Don’t descend into name-calling: Calling opponents “bigoted” or “hateful” can alienate those who are honestly wrestling with issues. Using measured, relatable language does more to create empathy.
- Avoid civil rights comparisons. While we use tips and strategies learned from earlier civil rights struggles there is a distinction. Comparisons to the Civil Rights Movement can alienate some people. It’s important to talk about issues in ways that continue to build common ground, rather than in ways that create distance.
DISCRIMINATION
IS HAPPENING IN HOUSTON
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The Houston Equal Rights Ordinance was passed by Houston City Council on May 28, 2014. The ordinance provides protection from discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations and covers 15 protected characteristics, including: sex, race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, familial status, marital status, military status, religion, disability, sexual orientation, genetic information, gender identity, and pregnancy.

Since May 28, 2014, the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance has NOT been in effect as a result of attempts to repeal the law by opponents.

Cases of discrimination have been reported to the City of Houston’s Office of the Inspector General. These reports were made by people who were informed enough to contact the OIG’s office, but consider all of the cases that have gone unreported.

Below is a breakdown of the types of discrimination that have been reported to the City between May 28, 2014 and January 15, 2015.*

![Discrimination Breakdown Chart]

**SUMMARY**
- **RACE** - 54%
- **GENDER** - 17%
- **AGE** - 15%
- **DISABILITY** - 4%
- **NATIONAL ORIGIN** - 4%
- **SEXUAL ORIENTATION/ GENDER ID** - 4%
- **VETERAN STATUS** - 2%

HERO provides local solutions to local problems and allows people to report discrimination without having to hire an attorney or be tied up in court. The facts are clear, Houston needs the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance. For more information, visit www.HOUequality.com.

**Source**
1. Texas Public Information Act submitted to the Office of the City Attorney.
* Total reported cases between 05/28/2015 - 01/15/2015 - 84
* Case types covered by the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance - 52