

TRANSADVOCATE

Houston trans-inclusive equity ordinance survives

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Abstract

Houston Mayor Annise Parker and City Attorney David Feldman announced that the effort to overturn equality failed to collect enough valid petition signatures to put minority rights up for a popular vote in the upcoming November election. Even though the Houston Area Pastor's Council (HAPC) has threatened to sue, due to time constraints, there is no possible way that [...]

Article



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[Figure] From lgbtqnation.com

It was widely reported that the HAPC was able to turn in 50,000+ signatures demanding that minority

equality be repealed in Houston. Numerous photos of HAPC wheeling in boxes of petitions were circulated throughout the media and these photos are now appearing juxtaposed to the news that the anti-equality group didn't have enough signatures.

[Figure] HAPC showing off mostly empty boxes for the press. The box in David Welch's (Box F) hands holds just 345 pages.

The claim of 50k+ signatures seems to have come from an estimate of the number of possible signatures, given that each anti-equality petition had 15 spaces for signatures. The claim of 50k seems to have gained traction by the HPAC's display of carting in what appeared to be box after box full of petitions. What HPAC failed to note was that the boxes they were carting in were mostly empty and it was extremely rare that a petition page was full of signatures. In fact, many of the pages looked like this:

Above are a sample of the petition pages HAPC turned in. These are pages 4 through 9. While these petition pages could be claimed to potentially hold 75 valid signatures, they held merely 7 signatures the HAPC itself identified as being valid.

Unsurprisingly, the City of Houston Secretary, City Attorney and independent petition reviewers all found numerous problems with petition signatures.

The Harris County DA is currently investigating a HAPC representative for engaging in voter fraud while working to overturn the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (AKA, "HERO"). The investigation comes after the TransAdvocate caught the representative on tape attempting to violate Texas Election laws.

[Figure] Notice from City of Houston Secretary certifying only 15,249 signatures

The City Secretary, Anna Russell, who has served as the City Secretary for more than 40 years, was able to certify only 15,249 petition signatures as being valid. HAPC is claiming that they fell short due to a homosexual conspiracy. "We were well aware we were dealing with an administration that's willing to bend the rules," said David Welch, spokesperson for the HAPC.

HAPC Hyperbole

In a perverse twist of irony, the group that stood against the most recent Houston equality ordinance recruited may black Christian pastors to be the voice of their bigotry. While waving their bibles in the air, these bigots asserted this fight for equality was in no way reminiscent of traditional civil rights efforts. However, PoC leaders like past City Council Member, Jolanda Jones, the TransAdvocate Editor, Monica Roberts, Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, the NAACP, the Urban League and LULAC didn't see it that way.

This is a human rights issue. It is a civil rights issue and if people haven't noticed, I happen to be black since people seem to think there is a distinction between being black and being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. It is the same. You are who you are; you are born like that. I am hurt [begins to weep] that I hear people using religion to figure out ways to discriminate... I hope that those who vote do it for the right reasons because god forbid you have a GLBT person in your family; I've had 2 friend's kids commit suicide over discrimination against that community. So, I urge you to vote for it because it's a human rights issue! - City Council Member, Jolanda Jones

I'm one of the people folks on the other side was demonizing earlier this afternoon. I'm part of the

transgender community. I'm also a proud African-American. What I heard over the last couple of hours from ministers in my community really sickened me. That they didn't believe that it's possible to be part of the transgender community and be a proud African America [turns to face the bigots seated]. Hello, I'm here! - Monica Roberts

After appealing to religion, tradition and ideological morality, out came the Oppressed as Rapists meme. The meme was used against both gay and trans people:

[Figure] "Stay out of our bathrooms & businesses!"

[Figure] Bigots assert they shouldn't have to use the same bathroom as a gay person.

Note the Oppressed as Rapist meme promoted in the below talking-points handout given to equality foes. These talking points were referenced time and again by bigots addressing the Houston City Council:

[Figure] Appeals to religion and tradition while demonizing LGBT people as rapists and perverts

The handout claims that "If men are allowed easy access to public bathrooms, shower rooms and/or locker rooms, then this can also promote sexual intercourse in a public setting. This can expose children to behavior that should not be so. This can lead them to start experimenting [with] different acts or things in which they normally would have never done." It claims that if the equality ordinance is defeated, "people's morality, ethics and/or beliefs" would be respected and goes on to warn that "physical, verbal, and sexual abuse can intensify" should the equality ordinance pass.

Republican State Representative Dwayne Bohac claimed that the Houston equality ordinance is a "threat to religious liberty" because it would force people to treat LGBT people equally. Furthermore, he claimed that equal rights would mean that children may be molested. Bohac, invoking the Klan Fallacy, cited a letter by the anti-abortion group, Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF). ADF is the selfsame group that gave rise to the Evergreen College hoax. The letter falsely asserted that video recording women using the restroom will become a supported activity should equality happen:

[The Houston Equal Rights Ordinance will support] the presence of men in women's bathrooms, shower rooms, and locker rooms, placing women and children at risk of voyeurism, photographing and video recording, and sexual assault.

The "Texas Values Coalition" asserted that our civil rights are subject to the personal whims of whatever religious standard someone might hold because that's traditionally moral:

Houston Mayor Annise Parker, who is an open lesbian, has announced a proposed wide-reaching LGBT ordinance that she plans to fast track into law within the next two weeks. This special rights ordinance is a direct threat to people of faith and traditional morality in the City of Houston. The ordinance would give government new power to force private individuals and businesses to affirm homosexual conduct and actual or perceived "gender identity" or face serious criminal penalties.

The above photo captures a powerful moment when activists supported a mother as her transgender son spoke before the Houston City Council, thanking his mother for her continued support. What makes this photo all the more powerful is that while they were attempting to enter City Hall to speak before the City Council, they were forcibly separated by a swarm of bigots. One group of bigots began shouting at the mother while the second group began laying hands on the child in an effort to cast out invisible

demons. The mother and son were saved by a group of equality activists who answered the mother's call for help. After this assault, riot police were present at the next hearing to ensure the safety of those wishing to speak before the city council.

The hyperbole-inspired violence was even aimed at the Mayor:

When I spoke to the Houston City Council, I implored them to not fall for the tactics of bigotry:

I'm really surprised that a lot of the adults here today believe that we Houstonians are not as mature as our children. Many of you know that in HISD, kids are protected on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. They manage it; they've managed it for two years now. How many of these horror stories have you heard? None. And yet here - today - we've had adults come in and swear up and down that we are about to experience a pandemic of sexual predators, sneaking into the bathrooms to carry out their nefarious purpose. I'm sorry but I think that we are at least as mature as our children.

When we stand on the equivocation that discrimination against discrimination is discrimination, we stand with the Klan member whose deep religious belief in the so-called "Curse of Ham" should give him the religious right to discriminate against black people. I hear the bathroom meme - this bigot's one-trick pony - and I ask you to not fall for it. It was used against the Jews, against black people, against the ERA fight in the 1970s, against gay people in the 80s and 90s, against people with HIV, against gay service members and here we find it rolled out - yet again - against trans people.

I ask that we not fall for it again.

The HAPC Sexual Harassment Scandal

While HAPC is quick to cast LGBT people as sexual deviants, HAPC spokespersons Welch and Baker are currently mired in a real sexual abuse scandal. When speaking against equality, Pastor Kendall Baker mentioned that he had just ended a 20+ year career with the City of Houston due to failures of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG). What Baker failed to mention that he was fired after the OIG determined that he had made lewd comments, sexual advances, engaged in inappropriate touching and solicited sexual acts from the females he was supervising.

David Welch attempted to help Baker escape facing the consequences of his sexual harassment of women. Welch even denounced the investigation into Baker's sexual harassment before the Houston City Council.

Baker asked the council, "What if I came into the restroom here while you were sitting on the toilet? How would you feel?" At the end of Baker's rant, Mayor Parker responding to Baker's aspersions against the OIG saying, "You are proof we do a good job in the OIG, sir."

The Houston Equal Rights Ordinance

HAPC hyperbole aside, the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance protects 15 separate classes. They are:

- Sex
- Race
- Color

- Ethnicity
- National Origin
- Age
- Familial Status
- Marital Status
- Military Status
- Religion
- Disability
- Sexual Orientation
- Genetic Information
- Gender Identity
- Pregnancy

Houston, following in the footsteps of El Paso, Austin, San Antonio, Dallas, Ft. Worth and around 190 other cities and counties with gender identity protections, passed the equality ordinance, 11 to 6.

Those voting against equality were:

- Brenda Stardig
- Dave Martin
- Dwight Boykins
- Jack Christie
- Michael Kubosh
- Oliver Pennington

Those voting in support of equality were:

Jerry Davis

Many of you, when I stepped into the chambers this morning noticed that I didn't have my goatee. I was gearing up for Malcolm X's birthday; I wrote my thesis on him in college and one of the quotes he had was, "If you aren't careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing." I think we've had a lot of that over the last two months. When he came back from his pilgrimage in African, he talked about going to the UN because the human rights of people were being oppressed here in the US. This is very dear to me; we talked about what happened 30 years ago [the 1985 Houston equality ordinance] in Council and being on the right side of history, but one of the things is that WE allowed the misinformation to get out; they just took the ball and ran with it. And so, if this ordinance passes today, we need to get out there and tell people what this ordinance is about. It's not the 'Mayor's Bathroom Ordinance' that a pastor put on his website today and I wish we could have a come to Jesus meeting with him about that.

CO "Brad" Bradford

We don't get to judge. So, in my choices and activities of life, I get to choose between what some say

poses a risk to children in bathrooms against denying access services to transgender beings who god made. Transgender beings are human beings that need access to services just like others do.

Richard Nguyen

Ed Gonzalez

We're not taking the lead on this necessarily, corporate America has already beat us to this, many other cities have beat us to this. And guess what? The sky didn't fall. Communities are still thriving and ours will continue to thrive as well. All of the individuals are citizens, we collect their taxes equally and we don't distinguish between some being more valuable than others.

Robert Gallegos

Thousands of Americans have lost their lives defending the basic principles of our country in regards to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and I'm asking my colleagues as elected officials to please support HERO. Many individuals have come up to the microphone and have voiced their concerns that they do not have those basic rights.

Larry Green

Sometimes in your life you will have votes that are bigger than yourself. To support an equal rights ordinance is something bigger than myself. As Dr. King stated, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in a moment of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at the time of challenge and controversy." I too have been threatened. I too have had misinformation disseminated in my district. I stand for equal rights for everybody in this city!

Mike Laster

The only opposition we have been presented with regarding this ordinance has been those who seek to exclude people from the protections of this ordinance and those, in particular, are members of the LGBT community, and that is greatly troublesome. Can you imagine any constituency advocating that we exclude race, color or ethnicity, sex or the religious protection? Of course not! But I'm grateful for the voices of opposition for two reasons: 1.) it's important that their voices be heard in this process, but more so, I'm grateful for those voices and the concerns expressed because they uniquely present the best evidence and the most articulate argument for including the LGBT community in this ordinance.

Ellen Cohen

I would like to use my time to quote from someone I admire greatly. Her name is Jill Ruckelshaus. She might not be familiar to you but she was the Chair of the National Women's Political Caucus Convention held in 1977. It was held here in Houston. Jill and I are very good friends; I've taken the liberty of changing a couple of words as I complete my remarks: "We are in for a very, very long haul. I'm asking for everything you have to give. We will never give up. You will lose your youth, your sleep, your patience, your sense of humor and occasionally, the understanding and support of people who love you very much. In return I have nothing to offer you but your pride in being a human being and all the dreams you have ever had for your daughters, sons, nieces, nephews and grandchildren, your future and the certain knowledge that at the end of your days, you'll be able to look back and say that once in your

life you gave everything you had for justice.

The remaining yes votes were: Annise Parker, Stephen Costello and David Robinson.

For the last four years, Houston has an executive order in place extending HERO-like protections to LGBT people on City property. For the last two years, it has been Houston Independent School District policy that HERO-like protections are extended to LGBT employees and children in HISD. Similar protections have been in place on Houston college and university campuses for years.

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