

SUCCESS STORY: FAIRNESS, WEST VIRGINIA

It's no secret that LGBTQ youth are in a mental health crisis right now. The COVID-19 pandemic shone a light on this crisis when schools closed down. Many of our kids depended on the social and emotional support they received from inclusive teachers or student groups. At the same time, many political leaders in our state continue escalating their attacks on LGBTQ youth, particularly transgender teens.



ANDREW SCHNEIDER
FAIRNESS, WEST VIRGINIA

Try as they might, politicians can't scare us out of standing up for LGBTQ youth. That's why instead of running from the problem, we leaned in. We launched the Safe & Healthy Schools Initiative to make sure we're doing everything we can to keep our kids safe, supported and prepared to become the leaders of tomorrow. We were able to hire a longtime educator to help us equip schools with the necessary tools to help all of their students thrive.

Outside of the classroom, we're making sure that LGBTQ youth are protected from the dangerous and discredited practice of conversion therapy. We helped the city of Charleston, our state's capital, ban this abusive practice in August of 2021. Our staff helped lead a citizen's advisory group for the city's mayor to write and implement this ordinance. Since then, three more communities adopted similar ordinances in less than a year.

Our state lawmakers have failed year after year to adopt a statewide law to protect all LGBTQ people from discrimination. Despite this, we're still making steady progress in our fight to end discrimination. We've now helped 17 communities across the state adopt local nondiscrimination protections, including several small towns in the heart of West Virginia's most conservative areas. These leaders are showing that no community is too small to stand up for what's right.

We're incredibly proud to support the work of community leaders across our state. The Municipal Equality Index has been an invaluable tool in these efforts. The MEI has inspired a kind of friendly competition among several communities in our state, each vying to improve their score and beat the previous year's highest score.