



Texas Business Leaders Defend Economically Vital Nondiscrimination Ordinances and Oppose Discriminatory Legislation as Bad for Business, Bad for the Brand, and Bad for Texas

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We will livestream the event for reporters who can't attend in person: <https://www.facebook.com/texaswelcomesall/>

AUSTIN, TEXAS- April 30, 2019 – Texas business leaders gathered at the Texas Capitol today to urge the House to put nondiscrimination ordinance (NDO) protections back into SB 2485, 2486, and SB 2487, and to reiterate opposition to any bills that would legalize discrimination and cast Texas in a negative light.

NDOs in Dallas, Ft. Worth, Plano, Austin, and San Antonio are the only explicit protections from discrimination that LGBTQ people have in Texas. They are in jeopardy of being challenged by the activists that powered the 2017 bathroom bill. Tomorrow the House State Affairs Committee will hear the Senate bills which aim to stop cities from regulating sick leave, benefits, and scheduling. These bills would nullify ordinances that regulate employment practices, which is also a function of NDOs. The Senate stripped language protecting NDOs out of the original SB 15, and later split SB 15 into four bills, none of which included NDO protections.

“At Visit Fort Worth, our goal is to welcome everyone to our amazing, vibrant city,” said Bob Jameson, President and CEO of Visit Fort Worth/Board Secretary of Texas Welcomes All. “We want to be a place where everyone has the same opportunities to live and work and visit and spend, and that NDO sends a clear message that Fort Worth is a diverse and inclusive place. Knowing that it might now be in jeopardy, because of an unnecessary change to the preemption bills now moving through the legislature, is a serious cause for concern for us. We rely on our NDO as a competitive tool when pitching for business.”

“SXSW has an annual economic impact of over \$350 million - similar to a Super Bowl, year in and year out, for the state of Texas,” said Hugh Forrest, Chief Program Officer SXSW. “We value Austin’s NDO as a clear signal to the more than 400,000 guests who participate in SXSW every March that they are welcome in Austin. If we were to lose this ordinance, we would struggle to convince some of them that they would truly be accepted here.”

“Without that NDO language, we know that activist groups are ready to strike to try to take our nondiscrimination ordinances out,” said Phillip Jones, President & CEO, VisitDallas / Chair of Texas Welcomes All. “They’ve already tried - including unsuccessfully suing the city of Austin over its NDO last year. There is absolutely no reason to put these NDOs at risk. They are not the stated focus of these preemption bills. They’re economically valuable. They’re valued by our residents and visitors. They contribute to our warm and welcoming communities. And they mirror the opinions of a supermajority of Texans.”

A long list of Texas employers, chambers, associations, CVBs, and business coalitions will also release an updated letter on the importance of diversity and inclusion and in opposition to discriminatory measures.

“These so-called religious freedom and bathroom bills, or any legislation that denies classes of people equal access to goods and services, or rolls back NDOs already on the books, make it extremely difficult for companies like IBM to recruit and retain top talent in Texas,” said Michael Hollinger, IBM Master Inventor, Principal Engineer, and the leader of IBM's LGBT+ Business Resource Group in Austin. “This license to discriminate will damage the state’s reputation and prevent people, including IBMers, from wanting to live and work here in Texas.”

“Associations are a driving force behind the meetings and conventions industry,” said John Graham, CEO of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). “Our organization now includes anti-discrimination clauses in all of our convention center and hotel contracts, giving associations an ‘out’ in any state that pursues discriminatory legislation. There are meetings already booked in Texas that can be canceled, with no penalty to the association, if Texas pursues legislation that legalizes discrimination.”

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