

## LGBT Rights: New Federal Initiatives to Combat Discrimination

After more than a decade of advocacy by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender rights groups, the definition of federal hate crimes was broadened to include attacks based on sexual orientation and gender identity when [President Obama signed](#) the [Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act](#) late last month. With the enactment of the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability have been added to the classes of minorities already protected by the first passage of hate crimes legislation; that 1968 legislation covered race, religion, ethnicity, and nationality. This major victory for the LGBT rights movement promises to build momentum for the advancement of more just federal policies for the LGBT community. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have taken recent steps that will build on this progress by working to eliminate discrimination against the LGBT community and increase community-based organizations' capacities to provide services for this population.

Last month HUD announced a [series of proposals](#) to ensure that its housing programs are inclusive of the LGBT community. HUD plans to issue a proposed rule, which will be open to public comment before becoming regulation, to ensure that no qualified individual or family be denied housing choice based on sexual orientation or gender identity by

- clarifying that the term “family” as used to describe eligible beneficiaries of the public housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs includes otherwise eligible LGBT individuals and couples;
- requiring grantees and those who participate in HUD’s programs to comply with local and state nondiscrimination laws that cover sexual orientation or gender identity; and
- specifying that any Federal Housing Administration–insured mortgage loan must be based on the creditworthiness of a borrower and not on unrelated factors or characteristics such as sexual orientation or gender identity.

HUD also will commission the first-ever national study of housing discrimination against members of the LGBT community. In the past, HUD undertook research on the impact of housing discrimination on the basis of race and color, with the [most recent study](#) conducted in 2000. This new initiative to confront housing discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity is crucial since, according to experts, in many local jurisdictions LGBT individuals and families, having little or no legal recourse, remain silent after incidents of housing discrimination.

In announcing plans to create the nation’s first [national resource center for LGBT elders](#), HHS is taking steps to address the unique needs of this historically stigmatized population. The new resource center will dispense information, technical assistance, and resources to both LGBT organizations and mainstream aging service providers at the state and community levels to assist them in the development and provision of culturally

sensitive supports and services. The center also will educate the LGBT community about the importance of planning ahead for future long-term care. The Administration on Aging will award a single [resource center grant](#) at approximately \$250,000 per year, pending availability of funds, to an eligible public-private nonprofit organization with experience working on LGBT issues at the national level.

In order to create a more equitable society for the LGBT community, all federal agencies must do more to protect LGBT individuals' civil rights by establishing comprehensive antidiscrimination laws and directing public funding to resources that support the LGBT population.

*For more information, contact Wendy Pollack, director, Women's Law and Policy Project, Shriver Center, at 312.368.3303 or [wendypollack@povertylaw.org](mailto:wendypollack@povertylaw.org).*