



SENATOR JOSÉ RODRÍGUEZ
DISTRICT 29

PRESS RELEASE



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Citing Independence for All Texans, Senator José Rodríguez files Senate Bill 856

*Texas Independence Day Perfect Opportunity to Promote Texas Values of
Opportunity, Faith, and Freedom from Discrimination*

AUSTIN, Texas – On the 179th anniversary of Texas Independence Day, Senator José Rodríguez (D-El Paso) filed Senate Bill 856, a bill that would prohibit discrimination in the areas of employment, public accommodation, housing, and state contracting based upon sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression. The bill was joint-authored by Senators John Whitmire (D-Houston), Rodney Ellis (D-Houston), Kirk Watson (D-Austin), and Sylvia Garcia (D-Houston).

“Fair treatment for workers, families, and people who visit our state—including gay and transgender people—is a crucial factor in the ongoing strength of the Texas brand. An inclusive Texas is crucial to recruiting and retaining talent, attracting entrepreneurs and company relocations, and maintaining a strong travel and tourism industry. Moreover, discrimination of any kind runs counter to the values of opportunity, personal faith, and freedom from discrimination that all Texans hold dear,” Senator Rodríguez said.

“Discrimination of any form has no place in Texas. Not in our schools, our government, or our services. I am proud to co-author this legislation and proud to stand strong for the fair treatment of all Texans especially our friends in the LGBT community who for too long have been the target of discrimination,” stated Senator John Whitmire, Dean of the Texas Senate.

“I’m proud to coauthor legislation to prevent fellow Texans from being discriminated against due to who they love,” said Senator Ellis. “All hardworking Texans, including our LGBT neighbors, should have the chance to earn a living, provide for their families, and live like everyone else without fear of getting fired or evicted solely because of who they are.”

“Every Texan deserves to be treated fairly, and this legislation will make our state stronger by protecting this important ideal,” Senator Watson said.

“All Texans should enjoy equal protection under the law. This important legislation would ensure that our LGBT brothers and sisters can express who they are without fear of discrimination. It would also send a message to the rest of the world that Texas welcomes anyone that wants to contribute to our great state, regardless of sexual orientation,” Senator Garcia said.

According to the 2012 FORTUNE 500 Non-Discrimination Project from the Equality Forum, 48 of 52 Fortune 500 companies in Texas already prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Many others also extend that protection to gender identity or expression. In 2012, the Center for American Progress reported that work environments hostile to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) employees cost companies \$1.4 billion in lost output every year.

Because Texas does not protect people who are gay or transgender from discrimination, many municipalities have already acted to extend discrimination protection to those residents. Currently 35.5% of Texans live in a city where discrimination against sexual orientation is prohibited. 33.9% live in a city where gender identity is protected.

“It is time—past time,” said Senator Rodríguez, “to make sure that all Texans have the independence our state claimed for itself almost 200 years ago. To be free of discrimination based on who you are, and to be treated fairly and equally is an environment Texas should be leading the way in creating, not being late to adopt. That’s what businesses want. But most importantly, all Texans deserve the right to provide for themselves and their families, secure a place to live, participate in the Texas economy, and contribute to the Texas economy, no matter what city they live in or visit and regardless of who they are or whom they love.”

Business leaders agree.

Catherine Morse, General Counsel and Director of Public Affairs at Samsung Austin Semiconductor: “Like so many other companies in Texas, Samsung is competing globally for the best talent. We believe that nondiscrimination measures will help us in that regard.”

Mellie Price, serial entrepreneur and Managing Director of Capital Factory: “For small and large businesses across Texas to compete for top talent, we must have workplaces and communities that are diverse and welcoming to all people.”

“I chose today—Texas Independence Day—to file this important legislation,” Senator Rodríguez concluded, “because Texas values—such as hard work, opportunity, and the Golden Rule—are the reason why Texas remains strong 179 years later. That is why we must act definitively to ensure everyone in the Lone Star State is treated fairly and equally.”

José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. He represents both urban and rural constituencies, and more than 350 miles of the Texas-Mexico border. Senator Rodríguez currently serves as the Chairman of the Senate Hispanic Caucus, and is a member of the Senate Committees on Education; Health and Human Services; Veteran Affairs and Military Installations; Nominations; and Agriculture, Water, and Rural Affairs.

