

L'taken was one of those experiences that I'll never forget. It was special not just because of the few hundreds of Jews in the rooms, the variety of different programming to learn about crucial issues, the friendships that were made and became closer, or the delivering of speeches to our congressmen. L'Taken mattered so much because for one of the first times in my life, I was able to truly do something remarkable and make a difference in the world.

*Ilana Schreiber's speech was written in conjunction with three other teens from Oak Park Temple in Oak Park, Illinois*

LGBT rights and the ENDA, the employment non-discrimination act, are especially important to us as Americans. America is described as the land of the free, and this proves that all people should have equal opportunities, regardless of creed, color, sexuality, race, or country of origin. The Civil Rights Act, passed in 1964, specifically outlaws segregation in schools and public places. In Title VII it goes on to state that workplace discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin is prohibited. These groups were "suspect classes", and sexual orientation and gender identity should be included in this list. The goal of the Civil Rights movement was originally to provide equal rights for African Americans, and has now moved to encompass the rights of women, other minorities, and is now including lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender individuals. In 29 states, it is legal to fire, refuse to hire, and demote a person based solely on sexual orientation, and it is legal to do this in 33 states if based solely on gender identity. However, 77% of Americans believe that LGBT people deserve protection against workplace discrimination. In addition to that, 440 of the Fortune 500 companies have invoked non-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation, and 285 have policies that also include gender identity. Despite public support for the bill, job discrimination is common. According to a study by UCLA's Williams Institute, 43% of LGBT people have experienced some form of discrimination in the workplace. In a 2011 report from the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, a staggering 90% of transgender workers reported some form of harassment or mistreatment on the job. The economic consequences of discrimination are real. According to the Center for American Progress, gay men earn 10% to 32% less than similarly qualified heterosexual men. Further, transgender individuals are twice as likely to be unemployed and are four times as likely to live in poverty. Nearly 20% have been or are currently homeless.

This issue deeply matters to us as not only Americans, but also as Reform Jews. In Genesis 1:27, it is stated, "God created humans in God's own image, in the image of God, God created them: male and female, God created them". This is an example of equality reflected to us in the Reform Jewish religion because it is written that we are all in the image of God, meaning that nobody is more or less important than anybody else. This also means that all of us have a piece of God in us, and therefore

were are all holy, regardless of sexual orientation or any other factors. Furthermore, Jewish text dictates in Leviticus 1:17-18 that “you shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall love your neighbor as yourself”. This also supports the Jewish perspective. Rabbi Janet Marder, former President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, wrote that “the Jewish values and principles which I regard as eternal, transcendent and divinely ordained do not condemn homosexuality. The Judaism I cherish and affirm teaches love of humanity, respect for the spark of divinity in every person and the human right to live with dignity. The God I worship endorses loving, responsible and committed human relationships, regardless of the sex of the persons involved”. In addition, the immediate past president of the Union for Reform Judaism has also said, “Regardless of context, discrimination against any person arising from apathy, insensitivity, ignorance, fear, or hatred is inconsistent with this fundamental belief. We oppose discrimination against all individuals, including gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, for the stamp of the divine is present in each and every one of us”.

My two mothers are lesbians, have been together for 30 years, and have had to deal with struggles regarding their sexual orientation their entire life. This shows up in their daily lives. They have told me stories of how they have been stoned in public several times. I am not kidding, people have literally have thrown stones them in public. Even though this seems very barbaric, it has still happened. In many instances, my parents have also been discriminated against in their workplace. One particular story that sticks out to me is of my mother’s coworker. The coworker had to hide her relationship with her wife by saying that the wife was her spouse because otherwise she would have to lie and pretend she had a husband, not a wife. The consequences of it being known that she had a wife would have included public humiliation and possible demotion from her job. The ironic part is that one of my moms works for the federal government. She has finally been able to overcome the discrimination against her and become the boss of her group, but this wasn’t without a huge struggle due to her sexual orientation. This has also affected me as I have been humiliated in school due to my parents’ sexual orientation.

In conclusion, we would like to thank you for supporting the ENDA bill, (SENATE: S:815) (HOUSE: H.R.: 1755). As Americans and Reform Jews we feel very strongly about this issue, and hope that you continue to support it in years to come.