

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**EQUALITY ILLINOIS ADDS FIELD ORGANIZERS AND  
OPENS SUBURBAN AND SPRINGFIELD OFFICES**

CHICAGO – Equality Illinois today announced the appointment of new field organizers and the opening of two offices to expand the reach of Illinois' oldest, largest and most effective LGBT advocacy organization at this critical time.

The new offices are in Westmont, to cover the Collar Counties and northern Illinois outside Chicago and Cook County, and Springfield, to work on issues and outreach in the central and southern parts of the state.

Filling the field organizer positions in the offices are Rachel Skylis in Westmont and Kristy DeWall in Springfield.

"We are thrilled to welcome Rachel and Kristy and announce the opening of the two offices," said Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois. "Equality Illinois has always had a statewide presence and strong lobbying effort in the state Capitol. With Rachel and Kristy's experience and enthusiasm, we will build on our 21-year commitment to serve the entire state."

The expansion comes as the drumbeat on issues related to LGBT equality gets louder, particularly the demand to end marriage discrimination. With the addition of the two field organizers outside Chicago, Equality Illinois is strengthening its ability to engage at the grassroots level, respond to local developments, build coalitions and grow the ranks of supporters.

"We will be able to show that the support for fairness is important in every corner of Illinois, be it passing local non-discrimination ordinances, ending bullying, adding transgender protections, and, of special significance at the moment, passing marriage equality," Cherkasov said.



**Rachel Skylis** will work out of the new Equality Illinois office at 500 Oakmont Lane, Westmont, at the same location as the Illinois Federation of Teachers. Prior to Equality Illinois, Skylis worked for Service Employees International Union in Michigan mobilizing residents as part of a statewide campaign for homecare. Skylis also managed and won her own campaign at Michigan State University to create LGBT-friendly housing on the campus. During her college tenure, she also served as advisor for four campus LGBT groups and served as an intern at the Victory Fund in Washington, D.C. "My



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commitment to LGBT equality and education began at a young age and is a lifelong passion," Skylis said.



**Kristy DeWall** will work out of the new office in downtown Springfield at 601 W. Monroe St., a few blocks from the Capitol. Her work with LGBT equality started in the late 1990s at Illinois State University, where she led the campus LGBT group and acted as a speaker's bureau coordinator for several years. She has master's degrees in higher education administration and social work. Having been raised in the Illinois foster care system, DeWall has been speaking for over a decade on how child welfare can be more sensitive to the needs of LGBT youth. In 2006, she became the first Mary Lowman Intern with the Child Welfare League of America/Lambda Legal LGBT Fostering Transitions Project in Washington, D.C. DeWall has spent the past five years in direct social work, working with at-risk youth and their families. Prior to graduate school, DeWall served 6 years in the Illinois Air National Guard while working toward her bachelor's degree in print journalism. "I am excited to combine my passion for LGBT equality and my love of central and southern Illinois in this new position at Equality Illinois," DeWall said.

Together, Skylis and DeWall will reach out to a variety of groups including faith communities, local businesses and community organizations to help further LGBT equality in Illinois.

The new organizers report to Caroline Staerk, the Director of Field Programs for Equality Illinois. She will continue to make frequent visits throughout the state, as will other Equality Illinois staff members, including Cherkasov and Randy Hannig, Director of Public Policy, who spearheads the statewide political work.

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