



**EQUALITY
ILLINOIS**

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2015 Gala

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Hilton Chicago

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Equality Illinois Background

Founded in 1991, Equality Illinois is the state's oldest and largest organization working to secure, protect and defend equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people throughout Illinois. The Equality Illinois Education Project is our 501(c)(3) arm, focusing on the educational and charitable aspects of the mission. EQIL's initiatives extend throughout every sector of Illinois life, reaching individuals and organizations both in the LGBT community and society at large, across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors.

History and Past Achievements

Equality Illinois is one of the Midwest's largest and most influential LGBT civil rights organizations. We made many great strides in pursuit of our mission, including the following:

- Equality Illinois actively succeeded in **securing statewide marriage equality**. We led a statewide outreach and advocacy campaign that engaged hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans around the freedom to marry. The bill passed with bipartisan support in both chambers in November 2013, with the law going into effect on June 1, 2014.
- Promoted, lobbied for, won passage, and defended the **Illinois Religious Freedom Protection and Civil Union Act** (civil union law) in 2010.
- Worked in coalition with partner groups to advance and pass the **Safe Schools Act**, which was signed into law in June 2010, and have subsequently worked to pass strengthened protections.
- Promoted, lobbied for, and won passage of amendments to the **Human Rights Act** in 2005, prohibiting discrimination based upon sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Developed a ground breaking "*Get Out the Vote*" campaign, **Vote Naked Illinois**, which received extensive media coverage statewide and around the globe. The campaign led to over 75,000 mail-in votes in the 2010 election in Cook County/City of Chicago alone.
- Registered thousands of new Illinois voters, and developed a strong network of over 120,000 human rights supporters throughout Illinois and beyond;
- Educated and informed citizens of Illinois and members of the General Assembly, and worked to raise awareness of issues confronting LGBT individuals in the community and the workplace.
- Expanded statewide grassroots support for LGBT issues and initiatives, individually, as well as in partnership with religious institutions and other community organizations.

EQIL has also worked with local communities throughout Illinois to pass non-discrimination ordinances, including **Cook** County and the cities of **Bloomington, Champaign, Chicago, Decatur, DeKalb, Evanston, Peoria, Springfield** and **Urbana**.

Equality Illinois enjoys the support of prominent business, civic, civil rights, legislative and religious organizations and individuals; major corporate allies including **AT&T, BMO Harris Bank, Exelon, Kirkland & Ellis LLP, Leo Burnett, United Airlines, Walgreens** and **Wirtz Beverage**.

Future Focus, Goals and Initiatives

Equality Illinois is carrying its mission forward by:

- Protecting marriage equality and defeating upcoming anti-gay legislation, policies and initiatives;
- Achieving full equality for all LGBT individuals in Illinois, with particular focus on historically disadvantaged community segments.
- Engaging and organizing communities of faith across the State in support of full equality for LGBT individuals through the ***Faith and Freedom Initiative***;
- Working with the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, the Equality Federation, and other national organizations to secure strong protections for the LGBT community;
- Surveying top Illinois corporations and law firms, helping them develop best practices and policies for LGBT employees;
- Building an effective, lasting statewide network through downstate and suburban Illinois to empower LGBT Illinoisans and to activate the population at large;

The Business Case for Support

According to the latest census, Illinois is home to almost 40,000 same-sex couples, about 21% of whom are raising children. The Williams Institute projects that should marriage equality become law in Illinois; there will be additional revenues of between \$39 and \$72 million over three years just from weddings by LGBT Illinois residents. This number will increase further with couples coming from other nearby states to plan their marriage ceremonies in Illinois. While the median U.S. household income is \$46,326, the median household income of gay men is much higher at \$83,000 and \$80,000 for lesbians.

LGBT individuals are especially loyal to brands and companies that support them. The Williams Institute survey shows that 81% of LGBT Americans are likely to consider brands that support non-profits or causes important to them. According to Community Marketing Inc., three out of four LGBT individuals have changed brands when a company has exhibited pro-LGBT support. By expressing support for LGBT equality, businesses send a positive and unequivocal message to LGBT employees and customers and make an important statement on diversity and inclusion

Membership Demographics

Equality Illinois has more than 100,000 supporters, of which nearly half reside in the greater Chicago area, with an additional 5,000 members residing outside Illinois. Our membership base forms a highly educated, politically- and socially- active, as well as well-resourced base of the LGBT market. According to our most recent Membership Survey, nearly 80% have a Bachelor's degree or higher, 31.5% have income base of at least \$100,000, and 92% are registered to vote. Our reach extends beyond the LGBT community, with 16% of our base identifying as heterosexual allies who are concerned with equal treatment of LGBT people. Our members closely follow the news and are loyal to partners in EQIL's work, with 92.2% saying that they read our monthly newsletters or would enjoy even more frequent updates. Equality Illinois also has more than 15,000 followers across our social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to expand our reach.

The Annual Gala

With more than 1,400 participants Equality Illinois' annual Gala is the largest LGBT black-tie gala in the Midwest – a popular and much-anticipated event for everyone. The 2015 Gala will be held Saturday, February 14, 2015.

As in past years, the 2015 Gala will generate substantial media attention in the gay as well as mainstream Illinois media. The attendees always include a wide array of state, county and city elected officials, business owners and executives, community leaders, and other prominent Illinoisans. The audience is both affluent and influential. Past political guests, awardees and honorees include **Senior Advisor to the President Valerie Jarrett, Governor Pat Quinn, Governor Jim Edgar, U.S. Senator Mark Kirk, Secretary of State Jesse White, Attorney General Lisa Madigan, Comptroller Judy Barr Topinka, Chicago Mayors Richard M. Daley and Rahm Emanuel and Bloomington Mayor Judy Markiewicz**, as well as then-Senator **Barack Obama**. Our generous Corporate Sponsors have included **BMO Harris Bank, Wirtz Beverage, United Airlines, Walgreens, Exelon, Leo Burnett, Kirkland & Ellis LLP, Kraft, AT&T, MillerCoors, Sidley Austin LLP, Neal, Gerber & Eisenberg, Quarles & Brady, Jenner & Block, McGuire Woods, Schiff Hardin, Hinshaw & Culbertson**, and many others.

Each year, Equality Illinois presents its Freedom Awards at the Gala to businesses and individuals who have worked to ensure that members of the LGBT community are treated fairly and equitably. Recent recipients include **the late State Representative Mark Beaubien, McDermott Will & Emery LLP, State Farm Insurance, Illinois Senate President John Cullerton, Laura Ricketts**, community leader and co-owner of the Chicago Cubs, and **Lana Wachowski**, director and screenwriter of the *Matrix Trilogy* and *V for Vendetta* as well as transgender rights advocate.