



Name: Campaign for Southern Equality

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Description

The Campaign for Southern Equality (CSE) is based in Asheville, North Carolina, and works across the South to promote full LGBTQ equality – both legal and lived.

More than one third of all LGBTQ Americans live in the South. Yet across the region, LGBTQ people lack basic legal protections, face robust opposition to our rights and have limited resources for advocacy and direct services. LGBTQ people in our region are also at an elevated risk of poverty and health disparities. Our community meets every definition of political powerlessness, evidenced most recently by the wave of anti-LGBTQ bills sweeping the South and by a dismal lack of elected representation in local, state and federal offices. While funding to the LGBTQ South is increasing (it has grown from less than 8% to 25% in recent years), the majority goes to large metro areas and large organizations.

At the same time, LGBTQ Southerners live each day with courage and strength and grassroots organizers across the region are doing heroic work to create equality. And every day, we hear powerful stories about how the South is changing and support for equality is growing.

Our work starts by asking what a LGBTQ Southerner needs when they are ready to lead transformative equality efforts in their hometown, or are ready to access services and support. Responding to this mix of urgent needs and entrenched structural issues requires a new approach. CSE was designed with an understanding of these challenges and is thus built to navigate them. Tactically, this requires that we use a range of tools in our work, including direct services, direct action, litigation, grant-making, and long-term organizing strategies to support a new generation of LGBTQ leaders and to build political power over the long term.

Our current work includes:

Legal Equality Project: This project focuses on achieving legal equality by striking down anti-LGBTQ laws, passing pro-LGBTQ policies across the South, and building political voice and power

for LGBTQ Southerners. CSE uses an array of tactics to do this, including litigation, lobbying, public education, voter registration and direct action. Current projects include a federal lawsuit challenging HB1523 in Mississippi; organizing to pass pro-LGBTQ policies in our hometown of Asheville, NC; and being part of coalition efforts to defeat anti-LGBTQ bills and laws across the South.

Southern Equality Fund: Through the Southern Equality Fund (SEF), CSE empowers local LGBTQ leaders across the South to promote equality in their hometowns. We believe that the organizers on the front lines of the Southern LGBTQ movement can transform our region—but they need the funding and support to do so. Through the SEF, we provide grants, trainings and support. Starting in 2018, CSE will increase our grantmaking to 10 percent of our organizational budget, creating a practice of organizational tithing. We accept applications on a rolling basis and also offer rapid response grants in response to emerging issues.

LGBTQ Rights Toolkit: Through the Toolkit, we respond to the acute and widespread need for direct services and resources for LGBTQ Southerners. Current programs include our [digital toolkit](#), which provides information about concrete ways LGBTQ Southerners can protect their rights and access support; free Pop-Up clinics that provide direct services and resources; publishing the [Trans in the South Resource Guide](#), with annual updates; and providing training and funding to support front-line providers of culturally-competent direct services. Since launching, CSE has run more than 140 free LGBTQ legal and resource clinics across the South, serving more than 4,000 people.

Telling A New Story About the South: We also focus on lifting up the voices and experiences of LGBTQ Southerners to tell a new story about LGBTQ life here. We do this through earned media, op-eds, and original content.

Core Beliefs and Track Record:

We feel deeply hopeful about what's possible in the South over the long term. We believe that LGBTQ Southerners possess the courage and resilience to be the architects of our liberation; that there is a moral mandate to respond to acute needs – often for legal and health services – in the lives of LGBTQ individuals and families; that our work is inextricably bound to the legacy, and future, of racial equity and economic justice movements in the South; and that every person – including those conflicted about or opposed to LGBTQ rights – can become an ally. All of CSE's work is based upon empathic resistance, a new ethic that calls for 1) resisting persecuting systems through public actions that authentically express self and community and 2) approaching those who oppose you with empathy.

CSE was launched in 2011 after a 6-year planning period to work toward full LGBTQ equality in the South. From 2011 to 2015, CSE was on the frontlines of efforts to win marriage equality in the South using an innovative blend of direct action, public education and litigation. We led the WE DO Campaign, which involved LGBTQ couples requesting – and being denied – marriage licenses in their hometowns, from Wilson, NC, to Morristown, TN, to Poplarville, MS.

More than 200 couples took action, with thousands of friends, family members and neighbors standing in support of them. We were honored to be part of the lawsuits that struck down marriage bans in North Carolina and Mississippi, as well as a lawsuit that struck down the adoption ban in Mississippi. During this period, we also offered more than 75 free legal clinics across the South, focused on topics such as health care power of attorney, name changes, family law and employment rights. Lessons learned during this first phase of our work have shaped our current efforts. Our work was covered by local Southern media, from The Wilson Times to The Hattiesburg American, and by national outlets including The New York Times, the Associated Press, and MSNBC, telling a new story about LGBTQ life in our region.

New data from the Williams Institute shows that more than 500,000 trans folks call the South home.

Too often, they face a lack of resources and support. We often hear stories of people going without medical care or traveling hours to reach a doctor who will treat them with respect. That's got to change.

To respond to that need, the Campaign for Southern Equality is releasing [Trans in the South: A Guide to Resources and Services](#). (This version is updated as of December 2017.)

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