

## Equality Act Synopsis and Reason for Feminist Amendments

The current version of the Equality Act (HR 5) that passed in the House and is pending in the Senate (SB 788) is a double-edged sword for women. On the one hand, the bill expands civil rights protections for lesbians, gays and bisexuals, a cause for which feminists and lesbian/gay activists have struggled for many decades. The bill also adds protections against discrimination for some--transgender individuals--but not all people who do not conform to gender norms or stereotypes for their sex. That too, is a good thing though it doesn't go far enough since it fails to protect gender non-conforming individuals, including gays and lesbians and many feminists who do not consider themselves transgender.

On the other hand, the current legislation conflates sex with "gender identity" which effectively eliminates sex-based protections for women and girls. It also explicitly requires that transgender identified males--any male who claims to be a woman--be admitted into women's facilities including bathrooms, locker rooms and changing rooms. That aspect of the current bill is equivalent to the self-ID law that was recently defeated in the UK. It is extremely harmful to women and girls.

The harm of self-ID provisions is a result of the fact that women and girls are still oppressed and discriminated against as a sex class in our society. We need programs for women and girls including under Title IX to redress past wrongs and equal the playing field, so that those of us born female have an equal opportunity to develop ourselves and pursue our dreams. We also need female-only spaces and refuges for reasons of privacy and safety, especially because male sexual and physical violence against women and girls remains pervasive.

Feminists in Struggle are calling for the Equality Act to be amended rather than defeated. We demand a better bill that protects everyone's rights and does not pit one group's rights against another. Our legal committee has drafted a Model Bill that incorporates Feminist Amendments into the Equality Act. The Model Bill has been approved by the democratic body of our active FIST members, the Feminist Assembly. Our version of the Equality Act preserves women's sex-based rights including the right to female-only spaces and programs while adding strong prohibitions against discrimination based on sexual orientation and sex stereotyping. For example, under FIST's bill all sex-based dress codes would become illegal.

Please join our Campaign for Feminist Amendments to the Equality Act! Let us know of your support. And spread the word to all your contacts. We know this is not going to be an easy struggle but neither was winning the vote. We in FIST believe that sisterhood is powerful and that together we can fight for our sex-based rights and win!