



Secretariat of the Human Rights Campaign

Background Guide



EagleMUNC

Model United Nations
Conference

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EAGLEMUNC

Introduction:

Letter from the Chair:

Hello, delegates, and welcome to EagleMUNC VII! My name is Becca Horton and I will be serving as your Chair this coming year for the Secretariat of the Human Rights Campaign. I am originally from Natick, Massachusetts, and have lived in the Boston area my whole life. As a senior at Boston College, I am pursuing a major in International Studies, as well as a minor in English, with hopes of attending law school after graduation to focus on civil law and human rights law in the future.

I initially joined Model United Nations my sophomore year at Boston College, where I served as co-chair of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Although I was abroad this past spring and thus could not take part in EagleMUNC VI, I had the opportunity to intern with a non-governmental organization for several months while studying in Geneva, Switzerland. While interning with the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), a group of lawyers that work to protect human rights around the world, I learned about the importance of discussing and safeguarding human rights and advocating for those in need. Since returning to BC, I have been very much looking forward to bringing these passions and experiences to this committee! There is so much work that goes on behind the scenes for a Model United Nations conference, and I am excited to prepare for a successful weekend this coming March.

This year, the Secretariat of the Human Rights Campaign will offer an in-depth glance at the advocacy of LGBTQ+ rights and the importance of ensuring such rights through lobbying, public education, legislation, and other means of spreading awareness. We will be tackling difficult, and at times, controversial, issues of how to protect and stand up for rights that, in some cases, many individuals take for granted. It can be disheartening to witness instances of

homophobia and transphobia that are still very much present in American society today, let alone in our country's own legislation and governmental bodies. While there is a wide variety of issues and challenges that the Human Rights Campaign has faced in recent times, in the coming years it must work to address the portrayal of the LGBTQ+ community in the media, the expansion of LGBTQ+ rights in state politics, and endorsements in the upcoming 2020 elections.

On behalf of the entire EagleMUNC staff, I welcome you to this year's conference and I am looking forward to meeting all of you in just a few short months. Over the course of the weekend, I hope you will be challenged, enlightened, and focused on having both fulfilling and fun experiences in this committee. I understand all of the hard work, dedication, and responsibility that go into preparing for this conference, and I appreciate your commitment to becoming both a successful delegate and an informed, upstanding citizen of your country and your world. Please feel free to reach out to me through email if you have any questions or concerns in the coming months, as I will be more than happy to help. See you all in March!

Warmly,

Becca Horton

Historical Background

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) was founded in the United States in 1980, and has been operating as an influential civil rights advocacy group and political lobbying organization across the nation for nearly forty years. As one of the earliest gay and lesbian political action committees formed in the United States, the early Human Rights Campaign was established as a Fund, and steadily grew in both size and prominence throughout the 1980s. By the mid-1990s, the committee had outgrown its initial political lobbying scope, and thus shifted from the Human Rights Campaign Fund to a Foundation of far greater reach under new leadership.¹ This important expansion and transformation helped to lead the way for the successful advocacy and work of the Human Rights Campaign of today.

The Campaign is organized and led by a staff of more than 150 devoted and passionate individuals across the country, all of whom work each day to bring equality to the LGBTQ+ community and further the HRC's mission. The Campaign is headed by a President, and its objectives and day-to-day operations are supported and guided by the Board of Directors, HRC Foundation Board, and the Board of the Governors. In 2003, the HRC successfully opened its first permanent institution in Washington, D.C., where it stands as both a central headquarters and important symbol of the fight for LGBTQ+ equality.²

With two non-profit branches and a political action committee, the HRC Foundation is able to conduct research, implement advocacy programs, and educate Americans on LGBTQ+ issues. In recent years, the HRC has focused upon lobbying Congress for stronger legislation in support of LGBTQ+ rights, and also mobilizing grassroots action on the wider public level.

¹ Human Rights Campaign. "About Us: Our History." Human Rights Campaign. 2018. <https://www.hrc.org/hrc-story/about-us>.

² Human Rights Campaign. "HRC Story: Our Building." Human Rights Campaign. 2018. <http://www.hrc.org/hrc-story/our-building>.

Today, the Human Rights Campaign logo has become one of the most widely recognized symbols, and encompasses the courageous fight for equal rights for all individuals belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. The introduction of the prominent yellow equal sign in front of a blue background helped to cement a new era of rebranding for the Human Rights Campaign, as it shifted from a small fund to a much larger, multifaceted organization throughout the late 1990s. In recent years, its widespread popularity has drawn positive attention to the HRC, and can be found and recognized across most of the world.



The HRC works to ensure the equal rights and freedoms of all LGBTQ+ individuals in America, and tirelessly addresses cases of homophobic and transphobic discrimination. Through the development of many different branches and programs, the HRC covers many fields related to LGBTQ+ issues, and works to represent and assist all individuals of the LGBTQ+ community. As the Campaign has continued to develop over the past decades, it has developed and expounded a central mission:

By inspiring and engaging individuals and communities, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBTQ people and realize a world that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. The Human Rights Campaign envisions a world where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people are ensured

equality and embraced as full members of society at home, at work and in every community.³

Today, the Campaign works to combat inequality within the LGBTQ+ community to ensure the equal representation of persons of color who identify within the community itself. There is no denying the importance of this organization, and the great strides it has taken, and will continue to take, to create an equal and more tolerant world.

CURRENT ISSUES

Topic One: The 2020 Election

Many of the issues that the HRC seeks to address are inevitably intertwined with the circumstances and developments of American politics, and depend significantly upon the work of government representatives and officials in power. Therefore, the election of officials that support HRC initiatives is vital to the success of the group and the fulfillment of its ongoing mission. The upcoming 2020 election will be a pivotal election cycle for the Campaign, with just two years to prepare for the political race. Though the HRC has accomplished significant gains on the federal level with the Supreme Court vote to allow same-sex marriage, there are also significant places for growth in legislation supporting LGBTQ+ rights on the federal and state levels.

Following the 2016 election cycle, several initiatives to support the LGBTQ+ community were disrupted. For example, the Obama administration's steps to protect transgender children in

³ Human Rights Campaign. "About Us: Our History." Human Rights Campaign. 2018. <https://www.hrc.org/hrc-story/about-us>.

schools were rescinded. In response, the HRC launched HRC Rising in 2017. HRC Rising is described as:

“a bold, proactive grassroots campaign to accelerate progress in states from coast-to-coast, resist the politics of hate, fight anti-LGBTQ legislation, and fuel pro-equality candidates and initiatives in 2018, 2020, and beyond. As the largest and earliest grassroots expansion in the organization’s 38-year history, HRC has made an especially strong, early push to organize against the Trump-Pence agenda and turn out the millions of equality voters in Arizona, Michigan, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.”⁴

The election of Doug Jones as Alabama Senator this year was supported and assisted by HRC volunteers. The HRC Rising campaign was significantly involved in that election, as the HRC has been working since 2015 to stop the anti-LGBTQ+ agenda of former Senator Roy Moore. To elect Jones, the Campaign reached nearly 200,000 voters, including the 60,000 LGBTQ+ voters in Alabama, explaining the extremism of Roy Moore’s policies. With that being said, the HRC and the entirety of the LGBTQ+ community has numerous local, state, and federal elections to consider in 2020. HRC Rising is likely incapable of supporting each of these fights on its own; the HRC must plan its 2020 election cycle strategy and implement new solutions to ensure success in order to protect the LGBTQ+ agenda.

In the past election, the HRC looked to target what they referred to as “The Equality Voters,” individuals that either belong to the LGBTQ+ community or are strong allies of its members, and are motivated to vote for crucial equality issues on election days.⁵ Though the strategy was successful in the election of Doug Jones, it did not secure victories across the

⁴ Human Rights Campaign. "Path to Victory in 2018: HRC and the Power of the Equality Voter." Human Rights Campaign. 2018. <https://www.hrc.org/blog/new-report-a-path-to-victory-in-2018-hrc-and-the-power-of-the-equality-vote>.

⁵ Ibid.

country. Through data collection, the HRC has pinpointed millions of key Equality Voters to reach out to in a newly-invigorated grassroots effort prior to the upcoming election of 2020. The Campaign must determine a means to make this data more fruitful in developing strategies to communicate with these voters.

It is hoped that voter modeling and outreach together will “bolster efforts to advance equality, defend the LGBTQ community against attacks, deliver wins for pro-equality candidates this year, and lay the groundwork for future legislative victories.” The HRC must continue to strengthen its grassroots campaign by finding methods to connect with their main voter base and spread awareness of the challenges and issues that will arise in the upcoming 2020 election.

Topic Two: Discrimination in School Systems

Discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in American schools, both public and private, is still a pressing issue that the HRC seeks to address. First and foremost, there is a lack of policies that seek to support and affirm LGBTQ+ students, as well as a school-side failure to comply with policies that are already in place. This has been noted to breed a hostile environment for many American students who identify with the LGBTQ+ community, as weak policy enforcement or a lack of policies altogether can leave individuals susceptible to serious prejudice and abuse.

A report issued several years ago noted that there was widespread bullying and discrimination against LGBTQ+ students in school systems throughout the United States.⁶ Since such blatant mistreatment and discrimination constitute a violation of the fundamental human

⁶ ““Like Walking Through a Hailstorm” | Discrimination Against LGBT Youth in US Schools.” Human Rights Watch. 6 June 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/12/07/walking-through-hailstorm/discrimination-against-lgbt-youth-us-schools>.

right of education, the HRC has labored tirelessly to assist the LGBTQ+ community in creating safer and more tolerant school environments across the nation.

The HRC has historically sought to address this critical issue through policy lobbying and ally education for educators and students. In the past decade alone, US lawmakers and school administrators have begun to design and implement policies that help students, especially those targeted for their beliefs or orientation in the LGBTQ+ community, feel welcome in their school environments and receive the education that they deserve. Nevertheless, there are still great strides needed to continue achieving progress across all states.

As was previously mentioned, in 2016, Jeff Sessions and Betsy DeVos “rescinded the Obama Administration’s guidance protecting transgender children in schools.”⁷ Discrimination against LGBTQ+ youth in public schools has been, and remains, a significant problem in the HRC’s fight to ensure equality. Several states have laws that ban teachers from discussing LGBTQ+ issues in school, but only a few have laws that prohibit bullying based on sexual orientation.⁸ In order to strengthen school inclusion and support of LGBTQ+ communities, it is highly critical that state legislatures work to “Ensure that state non-discrimination laws include explicit protections from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, particularly in education, employment, and public accommodations.”⁹

The committee should seek to address this problem, as it is not one that has been successfully handled to date. Among others, key issues may concern exclusion from academic curricula, a lack of resources for schools to support LGBTQ+ communities, bullying and harassment, and various restrictions placed on LGBTQ+ students.

⁷ "Path to Victory in 2018: HRC and the Power of the Equality Voter."

⁸ "Like Walking Through a Hailstorm" | Discrimination Against LGBT Youth in US Schools." Human Rights Watch. 6 June 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/12/07/walking-through-hailstorm/discrimination-against-lgbt-youth-us-schools>.

⁹ Ibid.

Topic Three: Transphobic Violence

Over the years, negative stigmas toward the LGBTQ+ community have at times put individuals at greater risk and exposure to violence. In some cases, those who misunderstand or are opposed to LGBTQ+ ideology have specifically targeted members of this community, with the intent to intimidate or physically injure others.

The transsexual community is a community that has been specifically affected by violence in the past decade. A report by the HRC, done in 2017, confirmed that in 2017, at least 25 transgender people were killed. This makes 2017 “the deadliest year in at least a decade” for the trans community.¹⁰ Even further, most acts

of violence against trans people in the United States are committed against people of color.

These in-house statistics make it evident that the HRC must take considerable steps to decrease instances of transphobic violence. As the transsexual population continues to increase in visibility throughout the United States, it is important that the HRC takes further actions to protect this ever-growing community.

The 2017 report contains the following

statement by the HRC:

¹⁰ Lee, Mark. *A Time to Act: Fatal Violence Against Transgender People in America 2017*. Report. Human Rights Campaign & Trans People of Color Coalition, 2017. 33.

“Accurate data and information can be a critical tool used to combat anti- transgender violence and its pernicious role in threatening transgender lives. However, as was the case in many of the stories presented here, tracking the violence is often impeded by anti-transgender bias itself. Law enforcement, journalists and sometimes even family members often refuse to accept and acknowledge victims’ gender identities. This can lead to preliminary police reports or news articles that misgender victims, making it difficult to track cases as they occur.”

The aforementioned lays out precedent for the HRC to take action on this issue within the realms of education, policy, and effort with law enforcement. Actors, then, should weigh the efficacy of these options to ensure swift response to an urgent problem within the LGBTQ+ community.

Topic Four: Protecting Vulnerable Youth

Adolescent members of the LGBTQ+ community have been found to have a greater risk of coming into contact with violence, most notably instances of bullying, teasing, harassment, and physical assault. As part of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in 2015, 34% of LGBTQ+ students surveyed reported that they had been bullied on school property, 28% had been bullied electronically, and 10% had been threatened or injured with a weapon while at school.¹¹ These statistics, among others, have shown that LGBTQ+ youth may be especially vulnerable when it comes to exposure to violence at both school and home.

While school systems should be a safe and welcoming place for students to arrive each day to learn, sadly this is not always the case for youth who identify as LGBTQ+. Not only does an increased risk of violence present a grave safety problem for those in the LGBTQ+

¹¹ "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 21 June 2017. <https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm>.

community, but it can also impact the mental and emotional health of young people and take away from their educational experience within the classroom. On average, LGBTQ+ students are



more likely than their heterosexual peers to be absent from school out of fear for their personal safety, which over time can lead to poorer academic performance and success.

Furthermore, 29% of LGBTQ+ youth surveyed in the same YRBS study stated that they had attempted to commit suicide in the past year, compared to only 6% of heterosexual children of the same age.¹² The staggering difference in statistics highlights yet another example of how LGBTQ+ youth can experience much higher chances of depression and mental health issues in comparison to heterosexual adolescents. Studies have notably found that these same youth also face greater risks of substance use, suicide, and certain diseases such as HIV. Together, these statistics have repeatedly shown that LGBTQ+ youth are particularly vulnerable to such issues, and that there is a substantial need to continue spreading awareness and support for these children.

The continuous challenges that LGBTQ+ youth face can have serious long-term consequences on their personal well being. Thus, it is essential that lawmakers and administrators continue to protect this vulnerable group of adolescents through more effective laws and policies both in school and everyday society.

¹² Ibid.

Questions to Consider

1. As the American political landscape continues to be populated by organizations like the HRC, what actions taken by the HRC are most effective in securing the interests of the LGBTQ+ community? What political actions, specifically in regards to lobbying, does this organization have to take to achieve these initiatives?
2. The HRC encompasses numerous smaller communities within itself, including LGBTQ+ People of Color. How can the HRC ensure equal representation of all peoples in the manner in which it addresses the aforementioned issues?
3. The HRC navigates complicated political waters within the United States. What are the best practices for the organization as a political actor, and how can the organization maintain ethical standards while operating across so many political sectors?
4. The HRC has recently focused many of its resources and initiatives on political influence, most notably in preparation for the upcoming election of 2020. How can this organization strengthen its outreach to the public, especially to key groups such as the Equality Voters?
5. How can the HRC work to combat discrimination against members of the LGBTQ+ community in school systems, and ensure that all students receive an equal education in a safe and welcoming environment?

6. LGBTQ+ youth have been found to be especially vulnerable to discrimination, violence, and mental health issues in many cases, and it is vital that the HRC work to provide support and education for this community. What challenges does the HRC face in these initiatives, and in what ways can they work with legislators to better protect LGBTQ+ youth?



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