

***USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
Special Emphasis Program (LGBT- SEP)
Caribbean Area – Quarter #3 - June, 2013***

JUNE is the **LGBT's** Pride Month

The USDA LGBT Special Emphasis Program

Four years ago, Secretary Tom Vilsack officially recognized USDA's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) employees through the establishment of a LGBT Special Emphasis Program (SEP). USDA prides itself for providing an inclusive and safe environment for all employees, including LGBT workers. The Department has been cited by the Office of Personnel Management as a model for other Federal agencies when it comes to our diversity and inclusion efforts, including our LGBT SEP.

"USDA is an example for the other agencies," U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Office of Diversity and Inclusion Director Veronica Villalobos told a recent all-hands meeting of USDA's Special Emphasis Program Managers. "OPM received 57 strategic diversity plans. We were looking for examples, and we have turned to certain initiatives in USDA's plan and shared them with other agencies."

LGBT workplace protections for some LGBT employees have advanced since USDA's 2012 Pride Observance. Last year, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued a ruling that an employer who discriminates against an employee or applicant on the basis of one's gender identity violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964's prohibition on sex discrimination. This means that for the first time, federal employees who believe they have been discriminated against because of their gender identity or for being transgender have an avenue for bringing a complaint. The EEOC decision was issued unanimously by the bipartisan commission.

Creating and maintaining a safe work environment for all employees makes everyone more productive. Research demonstrates that an inclusive and tolerant work environment for LGBT employees is conducive to productivity and provides them with a better overall work experience.

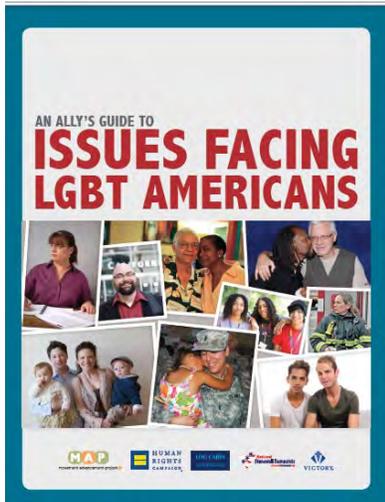
How can USDA employees create a safe environment for all employees? First, we can acknowledge that we all have biases, but as USDA employees, we all agree to abide by the same set of personnel rules and regulations. Another thing we can do is be a role model to others by encouraging tolerance and being vocal in opposing prejudice, no matter what form it takes. If you have questions about USDA's LGBT Special Emphasis Program or you would like to be added to USDA's LGBT Workplace Information mailing list, please email Perry.Stevens@dm.usda.gov.

**Perry Stevens, USDA LGBT Special Emphasis Program Manager
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Do you know ...



Recently, the NRCS' National Special Emphasis Program Manager, Ms. Sharon Nance, shared with us a copy of a publication titled: "An Ally's Guide to Issues Facing LGBT Americans". I found on it very interesting information that would like to share with you. However, if you want to read it completely, just copy and paste in your browser the following link: <http://www.lgbtmap.org/file/allys-guide-issues-facing-lgbt-americans-12-2012.pdf>

That guide was prepared by the MAP (Movement Advancement Project) who works collaboratively with LGBT organizations, advocates and funders providing information, analysis and resources that help coordinate and strengthen their effort for maximum impact. For more information, visit www.lgbtmap.org

Briefing the article, they organized the information answering this question: *What exactly is it that LGBT Americans want?* The answer is just as simple. LGBT Americans want the same chance as everyone else to pursue health and happiness, earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, and take care of the ones they love (see *Figure 1*).



Figure 1: The Goal: Equal Opportunity to Participate in American Life

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As part of the Ally's Guide, MAP presented the following graph:

Map 1: Employment Non-Discrimination Law



Note: A 2012 ruling by the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission extends Title VII's prohibition on sex discrimination to prohibit discrimination against transgender people.

However, we should add one more dark green colored region to the map for including the Island of Puerto Rico, because as recently as May-2013 the Governor signed a law for covering sexual orientation and gender identity in employment.

05/29/2013

PUERTO RICO GOVERNOR SIGNS MAJOR LGBT RIGHTS BILLS INTO LAW

LGBT rights in Puerto Rico took two big steps forward today thanks to the island territory's governor, *the Washington Blade reports*:

Puerto Rico Gov. Alejandro García Padilla on Wednesday signed two bills into law that ban anti-LGBT discrimination on the island and add sexual orientation and gender identity and expression to the U.S. commonwealth's domestic violence laws.

"The dignity of being a human being is inviolable because we are all the same and we must be equal under the law," the governor said in a tweet before he signed the measures at his official residence in San Juan. "Today is a great day for Puerto Rico. I feel that I have fulfilled my duty as a Christian to sign these laws."

This Monday, the Puerto Rico Senate voted to approve a modified version of the non-discrimination bill that passed the Puerto Rico House last Friday. The domestic violence law change was also approved on Monday.

According to the AP, the original version of the measure, which was advanced by the Senate earlier this month, went further than the newly minted law:



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Tips for Allies (adapted from New York University's Safe Zone Program)

CHANGE ATTITUDES.
CHANGE BEHAVIORS.
CHANGE DIRECTIONS.
CHANGE LIVES.
CHANGE POLICIES.
CHANGE VOICES.
BE AN ALLY.
BE THE CHANGE.



Challenging Heterosexism and Homophobia - A Key to Being an Ally

People are allies to the LGBT community for a variety of different reasons, and have different levels of comfort, experience, and knowledge about how heterosexism and homophobia affect both "straight" people and LGBT people. Accordingly, there are many different ways to be an Ally. Individuals are strongly encouraged to be allies so that they can learn, continue to grow as an ally, and to impact their community and the world in ways that are personally rewarding, challenging, and supportive. The ideas listed here are but a few:

- Understand your own values and feelings concerning LGBT issues
- Understand why you believe it is important (and how it helps YOU) to be an Ally
- Understand how heterosexism and homophobia affect both LGBT people and people who are not LGBT
- Understand your own culture, socialization, prejudices, and privileges
- Attend LGBT events, meetings, and programs
- Talk with and learn from LGBT friends, classmates, and colleagues
- Don't make assumptions, and ask about things you don't understand
- Risk discomfort, and take risks to learn and grow as a person
- Take an LGBT studies class, or another class dealing with LGBT or Queer issues
- Go see or rent LGBT-themed movies
- Use inclusive language like "partner" or "date"
- Don't "out" people unless given permission to do so
- Remember that there are people in your halls, classes, clubs, and jobs who are LGBT
- Consider that closeted people in your halls, classes, clubs, and jobs are wondering how safe that environment is for them
- Say the words gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender out loud!
- Talk with friends informally and openly about LGBT events or issues in the news, on TV shows, and in movies
- Interrupt, confront, or react to heterosexist or homophobic jokes, slurs, comments, or assumptions--this can be done privately or publicly
- Provide support to LGBT individuals who are targeted or subjects of heterosexist or homophobic jokes, slurs, comments, or assumptions - this can be done publicly or privately
- Sign a petition
- Participate in an AIDS Walk

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<http://lgbtq.gmu.edu/safezone/toolsheterosexismhomophobia.php>

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