

Considers 2016 Ballot Initiative (video)  
(Crystal A. Proxmire, Dec. 8, 2015)

Ann Arbor, MI – In Michigan it is illegal to discriminate against people based on factors such as race, religion, age and disability. However, discrimination continues against people in the LGBT community because it is legal to do so. In Michigan people can be fired for being gay or transgender. They can be denied housing. They can be denied service in restaurants and businesses. And it is easier to harass them because the state does not recognize bias and intimidation against them.

Efforts have long been made to secure equal

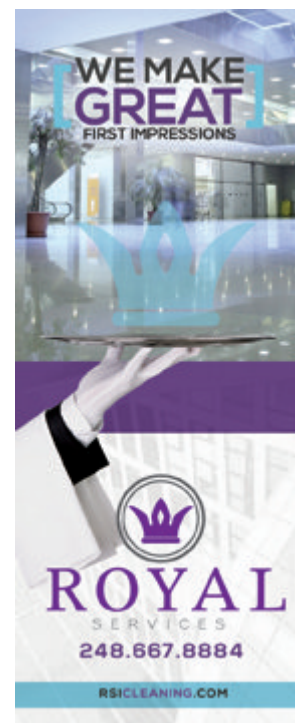
☒ protection for people in the LGBT community, and the current discussion centers around how best to achieve this civil rights goal.

Attorney Dana Nessel, best known for her victory in the case of DeBoer v. Snyder that went to the US Supreme Court and helped win marriage rights for same-sex couples, is now co-chairing an effort to get equal protection on the Nov. 2016 ballot for the state.

The proposal would change the Michigan Constitution to add gender, sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of protected classes.

While many in the community would like to have equal rights, the debate has come up over how best to get them, and who should be leading the fight.

There are three paths to getting legal protections. One is to



get them piecemeal through lawsuits. That is a process that can take several years per case, and only forces change in government intuitions not the private sector.

Another is if legislators in Lansing were to vote on it. Some discussion happened last year on amending the Elliott Larsen Civil Rights Act. A Republican, Frank Foster, championed the amendment and was swiftly out-spent in the primary and [lost his bid for re-election](#). FAIR Michigan research suggests that the legislature could be Republican-dominated until at least 2022. However, groups like ACLU of Michigan and Equality Michigan state that continuing to work

on the legislature is a viable path to rights down the road. Lastly is the path of a public vote, which FAIR Michigan contends is possible for 2016. "If you don't try, you don't have any chance," is a mantra used often by the FAIR Michigan team.

on the legislature is a viable path to rights down the road.

Lastly is the path of a public vote, which FAIR Michigan contends is possible for 2016. "If you don't try, you don't have any chance," is a mantra used often by the FAIR Michigan team.

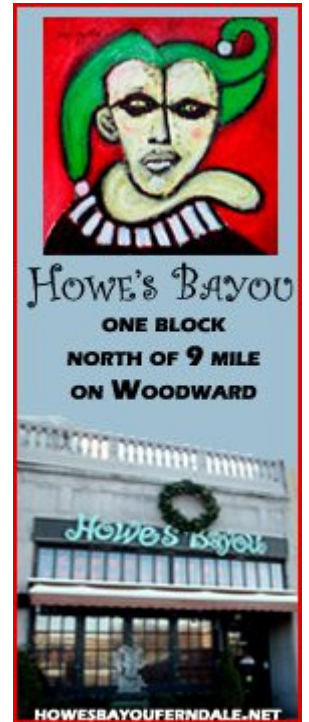
A community forum was held at Washtenaw Community College on Dec. 7, organized by the Jim Toy Center. Nessel was joined on a panel by Law Professor Robert Sedler of Wayne State University, Mary Pollack of the American Association of



University Women, and Amy Hunter Chair of the ACLU of Michigan Transgender Advocacy Project. There were also remarks by former Congressman Mark Schauer, Equality Michigan Director Stephanie White and State Rep. Jeff Irwin.

Longtime leaders in the fight for LGBT rights seem to be focusing on two main issues: fear of retaliation against LGBT people and transgender people in particular, and whether or not they should join a fight that they may not be able to win.

Nessel and Hunter disagreed on polling and modeling data about the viability of a ballot effort being successful, and ultimately



Schauer's recommendation was for leaders to come together in private to look more closely at the data. Nessel's numbers show 68% while Hunter's numbers show 42% probability of success.

FAIR Michigan will need to collect 315,654 signatures of registered voters to get the issue on the ballot, followed by months of campaigning to educate voters on the issue. Nessel estimates that \$12 million would be needed for the campaign.

Money is scarce in funding LGBT causes and the established organizations have always struggled for resources. However, Nessel said FAIR already has the backing to get the issue on the ballot, and hopes people, groups and businesses will join in the efforts.

The video below is a composite of clips from the community conversation:



**NOW DELIVERING!**  
Pizza, Beer & More

**248 - 542 - 2739**

**177 Vester St. Ferndale - M-BREW.net**