

International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia

May 17, 2015

Unifor calls on everyone to join us in recognizing May 17th as the International day against Homophobia and Transphobia. This day serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggles of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-identified communities as we renew our commitment to the continued struggle for justice. Homophobia and transphobia continue to take hold in both explicit ways, and in ways that are subtle, discreet and often invisible. Although in Canada we have made tremendous gains in legal, societal and workplace rights, homophobia and transphobia continue to prevent LGBTQ people from living full and equal lives.

Despite the legalization of same-sex marriage and various global initiatives that promote LGBTQ equality, homophobia and transphobia are still deeply ingrained in our everyday behaviours, language and policies and LGBTQ people's access to equality and well-being continue to be undermined.

For example, in recent years, there has been increasing concern about the high levels of homelessness amongst LGBTQ youth, the rights of transgender people and the lack of appropriate health care provided by a system that continues to be plagued with discriminatory practices.

There has been extensive research in the area of youth homelessness both in Canada and internationally which has produced great initiatives to reduce youth homelessness. Still, young people represent 20% of the homeless population in Canada. Within that, 25-40% identify as LGBTQ, making LGBTQ youth very over represented amongst the homeless population. Given the ways in which LGBTQ youth continue to experience discrimination and isolation, and given the higher risk of homelessness, LGBTQ youth are at an increased risk of mental health, substance abuse, violence and suicide.

Trans people in Canada continue to be at the forefront of the struggle for equality. Currently the only provinces and territories that explicitly protect gender identity in their human rights codes are Ontario, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and the Northwest Territories. Bill C-279, a private member's bill, would amend the Canadian Human Rights Act to include gender expression and identity, giving Trans people the legal footing to challenge discrimination. However, the lack of support for the Bill, particularly amongst Conservatives, threatens the chances of this important legislation being passed.

When it comes to health care, LGBTQ people deserve to have equal access to our universal health care system in Canada. There is an urgent need to strengthen the training of medical practitioners so that the needs of LGBTQ people are better understood and healthcare is provided in a respectful manner free of discrimination.

On May 17th, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans communities, along with allies, will take a public stand in support of the rights of LGBTQ people. Unifor stands in solidarity with its 310,000 members and LGBTQ communities across Canada in the pursuit of justice.