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Gov. Brown Signs Historic Transgender Bills

Members of the LGBT community have gained considerable ground with the recent passing of two bills aimed to help transgender Californians.

The Gender Nondiscrimination Act and the Vital Statistics Modernization Act were signed by Gov. Jerry Brown on Oct. 9 after a months-long campaign to recognize the basic rights of transgender people. "We're definitely excited about the positive effect the passing of these bills will have on the transgender community," said Mark Snyder, spokesman for the Transgender Law Center, an organization that co-sponsored the bills.

For months, the Transgender Law Center, along with Equality California and the Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA), have worked together to tackle the issues facing transgender people in California.

Among these issues is the lack of knowledge many employers, housing authorities, health care providers, and even transgender people have about discrimination laws, said Jill Marcellus, communications coordinator for the GSA Network.

Many people are unaware that it is illegal to discriminate against transgender Californians, she said.

The Gender Nondiscrimination Act, or AB 887, authored by Assemblywoman Toni Atkins, D-San Diego, takes existing protections based on gender and strengthens the language of those laws, making it clear that gender expression and gender identity are included in those protections.

The new language will clarify the responsibilities of employers, schools, landlords and other institutions and ensure that transgender people are aware of their rights, she added.

By making these protections explicit, people will more clearly understand California's nondiscrimination laws, increasing the likelihood that employers, schools, housing authorities, and other institutions will work to prevent discrimination, she said.

"As Californians, we are committed to equal treatment for all," Atkins wrote in a statement on her website. "I am gratified that the governor recognizes the importance of these protections." AB 887, which was also co-sponsored by Equality California and the GSA Network, will go into

effect Jan. 1, 2012.

The Vital Statistics Modernization Act, or AB 433, authored by Assemblywoman Bonnie Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, will "alleviate the confusion, anxiety and even danger that transgender people face when they have identity documents that do not reflect who they are," according to Equality California.

AB 433 would also allow eligible petitioners living or born in California to submit a gender change petition from any jurisdiction in the state. The current statute states a gender-change petition must be submitted in the jurisdiction of a person's place of residence, conflicting with the case law that states gender change petitions can also be submitted in the jurisdiction where a person was born.

Equality California noted that AB 433 does not make changes to the law but simplifies the process through which people go about to complete a gender change petition.

AB 433 also goes into effect on Jan. 1, 2012.

"Our victory is a testament that California is at its best when we work together to realize the ideal that everyone should be treated fairly and equally," said Masen Davis, executive director of the Transgender Law Center.

"The barriers that transgender people face are life-threatening, and we applaud Gov. Brown, Assemblywoman Atkins and Assemblymember Lowenthal for their tremendous leadership to remove some of the obstacles that prevent transgender Californians from living as our authentic selves."

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