



Equality  
Network

Equality Network  
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07.05.24

Dear First Minister,

On behalf of everyone at Equality Network and Scottish Trans, we would like to congratulate you on your appointment by the Parliament.

We look forward to working with you and your government to improve the rights and wellbeing of all people in Scotland, including those of the groups we represent: Scotland's LGBTIQ+ people. This is work we have been engaged in for the entire history of the Scottish Parliament so far - 25 years, almost to the day.

We welcome your emphasis on respectful discourse and the seeking of common ground. We think there is a great deal of scope to improve this, and a real need for it at the current time. It is sometimes suggested that LGBTIQ+ equality, especially trans people's equality, is incompatible with equality for and protection of women. We have worked for more than 20 years with women's equality organisations, and we know that, through respect and sensitivity, it is perfectly possible to pursue both successfully. In fact, they can be mutually sustaining. Equality and human rights are not a cake where a slice given to one group means less for others.

LGBTIQ+ people are part of the ordinary people of Scotland. Like others, we are diverse, we are intersectional, and we are marginalised, but we are also quite ordinary. Our lives are ordinary, despite our being painted as something unusual, strange, othered. We study and work, we seek support, access healthcare, rely on public services. We struggle with housing and the cost-of-living, caring responsibilities, old age, and are concerned about the planet. Because we are LGBTIQ+, we can also be disproportionately affected by rising prejudice and discrimination, by a toxic media culture, and by poor mental

health. We are the ordinary people who bear the brunt when debates descend into so called 'culture wars'.

Scotland's makeup is diverse. LGBTIQ+ people, disabled people, black people, minority ethnic people, people of minority faith, older people, younger people men, women, those who are somewhere between or beyond, and people with multiply marginalised identities make Scotland what it is: a nation that has in the past led the way in its bid to end discrimination, oppression and prejudice. We are proud to have been a part of this, and to have seen so many milestones passed that protect everyone in Scotland, including those most marginalised.

It is vital that government action aims to improve the lives of everyone in Scotland, in all our diversity. Our rights as humans unite us.

We recognise that the government must prioritise, but we also note that that must not mean ignoring or deliberately excluding the wellbeing of some groups. It will be important to continue to assess the impact of all policy and legislation to maximise its positive impact for all.

We would like to highlight some of the areas of policy development that we have worked on for some time alongside the Scottish Government and others which will continue to need attention:

- Development of legislation to **end conversion practices in Scotland**, including a civil scheme and non-legislative measures, which we believe will be the most impactful for many members of the LGBTIQ+ community.
- Implementation and monitoring of the **Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021**. This requires continued support and attention to address the rate of reported hate crime.
- **Improving mental health outcomes for people across Scotland**, including those belonging to marginalised communities who are evidenced to be more likely to have poor mental health than the general population.
- **Improvement of gender identity services in Scotland**, by delivering the commitments in the "NHS gender identity services: strategic action framework 2022-2024" and maintaining the recently announced commitment to ensure that all £9 million originally committed to service improvements over three years is invested over five years. This should include ongoing work from the Scottish Government beyond the

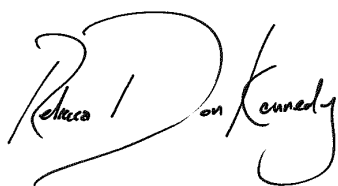
framework to ensure that trans and non-binary people can access high quality, timely healthcare.

- Delivering the commitments in the Scottish Government's **Non-Binary Equality Action Plan 2023**, the first of its kind worldwide.
- Introduction of a **Human Rights for Scotland Bill**, with the aim of incorporating four international human rights treaties into Scots law, providing stronger and better protections for the people of Scotland, and bringing us in line with international best practice.

The achievements and advances that Scotland has made in LGBTIQ+ rights over the past 20+ years have been hard-won, and have improved the lives of people in our community and others. However, we know just how easy it is for this progress to stall or roll back.

We ask that you continue this vital work to make Scotland a safe place for all, and a country where everyone, no matter who they are, can flourish.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Don Kennedy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rebecca" and last name "Kennedy" clearly legible, and "Don" written in smaller letters between them.

Rebecca Don Kennedy, Chief Executive Officer, Equality Network

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vic Valentine". The signature is written in a bold, cursive style.

Vic Valentine, Manager, Scottish Trans

And everyone at Equality Network and Scottish Trans.