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IT'S TIME TO END JOB DISCRIMINATION, SAY WORKPLACE ADVOCATES

SAN FRANCISCO: MARCH 30, 2011: Out & Equal Workplace Advocates applauds the reintroduction of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which would ban discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace. Federal legislation is needed because only thirteen states, plus the District of Columbia, provide protections that include both sexual orientation and gender identity, while an additional eight states cover sexual orientation only. This leaves employees in 60% of the United States vulnerable to harassment and discrimination on the job without any legal recourse.

“Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in this country continue to be fired daily simply because of who they are. Think of it—a single manager, acting out of nothing more than personal prejudice, can rob a company of a skilled employee and deprive that person of the means to support themselves and their family,” noted Selisse Berry, Out & Equal’s Executive Director. “Our country can’t afford to have more people out of work and our businesses can’t afford to be short on good employees. Discrimination should never be the deciding factor in an employee’s career—people should be judged on their skills, contributions, and dedication to the job.”

Business leaders have long understood this principle. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of Fortune 500 companies currently include sexual orientation in their non-discrimination statements, while 43% of them also ban discrimination based on gender identity. These numbers have risen steadily in recent years. This week, almost fifty openly lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender executives and emerging leaders are meeting with Out & Equal in San Francisco to discuss ways to promote greater equality in the workplace.

“It’s just good business—a diverse, committed, energized workforce contributes more to a company than employees who are struggling to cope with the impacts of discrimination. Acts of prejudice lead to lost time, energy, and resources,” commented Kayla Shell, president of the Out & Equal Board of Directors.

The Employment Non-Discrimination Act would address the issue. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Barney Frank of Massachusetts, along with 203 co-sponsors, is identical to the one considered in 2009, which stalled in committee last year. The 2009 bill had the most co-sponsors, at 203, of any LGBT legislation to date. The legislation applies to businesses with 15 or more employees, labor unions, and governments, and exempts religious institutions and the military.

While unlikely to pass in the current Congress, the introduction of the bill provides an opportunity for continued education about the needs of LGBT employees and the discrimination that they face.

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Out & Equal Workplace Advocates

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