



## **GENDER & LGBTQ+**

# **LGBTQ+ families and advocates juggle caregiving with movement-building**

Family Equality CEO Stacey Stevenson discusses the fight for LGBTQ+ rights and their experiences with homophobia while starting and taking care of their family

by Pamela Appea  
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**Family Equality CEO Stacey Stevenson**

When I interviewed Stacey Stevenson, they were in the midst of a whirlwind of work events and just a few days out from moving their wife, Cheralyn Stevenson, and two children from Texas to Washington, D.C. Stevenson is the new CEO of Family Equality, a nonprofit organization that advances equality for LGBTQ+ families while providing resources and advocacy for those looking to build and expand their families.

Stevenson's home state of Texas has been in the news a lot lately—for all the wrong reasons. For much of the last year, Republicans in the state have ramped up their pursuit of an anti-LGBTQ+ [political agenda](#). Transphobic and homophobic legislators have a laser focus on children's and families' rights, including limiting and preventing access to health care, mental health services, and gender-affirming care for trans kids. In fact, the state's child welfare agency has been ordered to [initiate child abuse investigations](#) if caregivers of transgender children and teens receive gender-affirming care, hormonal therapy, or other care.

The targeting of LGBTQ+ kids hits close to home for Stevenson.

Back in their high school years, a bully publicly “outed” them to the entire school community, and their family reacted poorly. Stevenson remembers a constant barrage of name-calling from students and indifference from teachers and school staff who ignored the daily bullying and harassment that prevented Stevenson from being able to learn. Stevenson dropped out of high school mid-year and spent the next 12 months at home taking care of their younger sibling to help their mother, who was juggling work, child care, and related family expenses. Finally, Stevenson earned their GED.

Shortly afterward, Stevenson managed to scrape together around \$70 to move to Dallas for a better life. Once they arrived, they quickly followed their dreams and got their foot in the door in corporate jobs. They later went

on to earn bachelor's and master's degrees in management after starting a family.

Stevenson spent over 20 years working in the corporate world, but as the assault on LGBTQ+ rights in Texas and elsewhere started to ramp up during the previous presidential administration, Stevenson started thinking more and more about making a difference. They say that “leaving the corporate world behind was one of the best decisions they ever made.” When Stevenson found out Family Equality was looking for a CEO, the whole process was very “synchronistic.”

Still, leaving Texas wasn't an easy decision. Born and raised in a small town in southern Texas, Stevenson loves her home state, and her large extended family can trace their roots back several generations—but still she has decided to leave, both for their career and to find a safer and more supportive environment for their family. Stevenson spoke with Prism about their story, how LGBTQ+ families are seeking safety amid political attacks, and where Family Equality fits into their fight for social change.

*Prism's conversation with Stevenson has been condensed and edited for length and clarity.*

Pamela Appea: Tell me about your family. What has your journey been like as a parent and caregiver?

Stacey Stevenson: Historically, Texas has not been very open to LGBTQIA+ people. And in many states it is legal to discriminate against LGBTQIA+ people who wish to become parents. [But] I always knew that I wanted kids. My wife and I faced intense discrimination when starting our family. Our dream of becoming parents didn't happen for eight long years. All those experiences really taught me to help other people.

Anyone who wants to have a family should do so, especially in the LGBTQIA+ community. By choosing to come out as a same-sex family, my life sometimes is at risk. I'm willing to do that; I have to.

My family is [more supportive now](#). Something happens when you have children. They see us as a family now. We have a very supportive network of aunts, uncles, and cousins, and other relatives here in Texas.

Appea: Tell me more about Family Equality's history.

Stevenson: The organization is a national organization that aims to support all LGBTQIA+ families who want access to resources, information, and support. Family Equality's Path2Parenthood program assists members and provides resources to the LGBTQIA+ community members who are interested in becoming parents or growing their families through fertility treatment methods or adoption. Additionally, Family Equality's policy team gives "equality maps" and [state guides](#) providing information [on] everything from foster and adoption laws from state to state to family leave laws and specific state non-discrimination laws.

Appea: Tell me more about what kind of work Family Equality is doing. What are your current campaigns, areas of focus, and recent accomplishments?

Stevenson: Here we are in 2022, seeing rules and proposed legislation about eroding the rights of people, of LGBTQIA+ families, and individuals. We have many [educational events](#), webinars, and in-person events about growing your family and, of course, keeping your family safe. We have in-person and online activities and support groups. We want our families to be able to exist without challenges. We work very closely with the [current presidential administration](#). We are working on legislation and counter-legislation, including the [Respect for Marriage Act](#) [proposed legislation that aims to codify a national law for same-sex marriage and interracial

marriage] and our [Every Child Deserves a Family campaign](#), [which aims to increase the number of LGBTQIA+ youth who are placed into safe, affirming homes, while also aiming to prevent LGBTQIA+ parents from being discriminated against for foster and adoptive placements]. In the state of Florida, there's the [Don't Say Gay](#) legislation. They are trying to silence us.

Family Equality has 20 staff members, including interns; what's next is we can continue to protect marriage and provide resources for our families. People will need to know what it will mean if marriage equality is overturned.

People are moving to safer states now. We are moving. Some people are literally dropping everything and leaving their state because they are afraid for their transgender child.

Appea: What are your thoughts on President Joe Biden and the current administration when it comes to LGBTQ+ families and policies?

Stevenson: President Biden signed an [Executive Order Advancing LGBTQIA+ Individuals](#) during Pride month this past June. This order included increasing the rights of our children and our families, so that is a positive step.

[T]hey should keep on doing what they are doing so the momentum can continue. We need to be able to address all of the anti-LGBTQIA+ proposed legislation. What's on my radar is that our families continue to have a voice.

We saw signs of it coming with the previous administration. What we are seeing right now in 2022; it has become worse. During the previous administration in 2018, there were [about 100](#) anti-LGBTQIA+ proposed

pieces of legislation. Now, in 2022, there are now [over 250](#) anti-LGBTQIA+ pieces of legislation, many of which relate to LGBTQIA+ families.

I don't think we could have predicted we would be fighting for marriage again. I didn't expect that *Roe v. Wade* would be overturned. I absolutely did not think any of those things would happen, so it's certainly worse than we thought.

Appea: How do you juggle the love you have for your home state of Texas alongside any concern you might have for new anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and additional proposed anti-LGBTQ+ legislation? How safe is it for LGBTQ+ families living in Texas and elsewhere?

Stevenson: I love Texas; I was born and raised here. I grew up in a small town in southern Texas called Robstown. Both of us [Stevenson's wife Cheralyn], were born and raised here in Texas, and we have a large loving family with cousins, aunts, uncles, and others. The roots are deep here in Texas for both of us. Still, we are leaving Texas for Washington, D.C. We planned this move, and we were able to do the research. But other LGBTQIA+ families may not have the luxury, and we have to help families in crisis. Family Equality is about helping all families, especially families who may not know where to go and who need information or advice or resources. Family Equality's mission is to advance legal and lived equality for LGBTQIA+ people, ensuring that everyone has the freedom to find, form, and sustain families.

I signed up to be a spokesperson for Family Equality. My kids did not sign up to fight for marriage equality. I need to make sure that they are in a state where they are accepted [and where] they don't have to defend and explain their family every day. My love for my [extended] family and relatives, the love for my home state—all are true. But I am putting my two boys as the priority. The safety and well-being of my children are of the utmost importance.

Appea: What is your response to individuals who say they don't believe that LGBTQ+ marriage equality rights could be overturned?

Stevenson: I say to you this: the Supreme Court overturned over 50 years of precedent in *Roe v. Wade* ... if they are willing to undo 50 years of precedent, how can you say that marriage equality can't or won't be overturned? Marriage equality has only had seven years of precedent [from] 2015.

Listen to what they say in the Supreme Court [*Dobbs v. Jackson*] decision. They have signaled that more is to come. I don't think we should rest. I don't think we should be complacent and say that this is never going to happen. We are already going to work. We are going to continue to work. We can't get comfortable. It is much worse than what we thought. I don't want to have a conversation with you in the future about why we didn't do more.

We have to take action now. Our marriages are under attack *now*; our trans kids are under attack *now*. Our lives are under attack *now*. That means we have to do something *now*.

<https://prismreports.org/2022/09/26/lgbtq-families-caregiving-movement-building/>