

Winning in Florida... You Heard that Right

Jon Cohen, Director of Community Mobilization

In March of 2024, those who work to protect LGBTQ+ rights won big in Florida. That's right. You can read that sentence again: *LGBTQ+ rights won big in Florida.*

With our coalition partner Equality Florida, my co-captain, Tracey Labgold (Keshet's Florida Education & Training Manager), and I led a group of 10 Jews and allies through the halls of the Capitol building in Tallahassee. We met with Republican and Democratic lawmakers, making the Jewish case against the introduced anti-LGBTQ+ laws.

Consistently during those meetings, lawmakers were curious about the way our Jewish identity intertwined with our queer identities and how we found our faith to affirm LGBTQ+ rights. I remember after meeting with multiple Republican lawmakers and their aides, our group would leave saying things like: "It felt like they really listened...Can we trust them? Was it all a show?"

The answer to that question was made clear in the outcome: almost all of the anti-LGBTQ+ bills that we were advocating against failed.

21 out of the 22 anti-LGBTQ bills did not pass or were changed to exclude harmful provisions.

The one bill that did pass, the "Stop WOKE Teacher Training" bill, will likely be found unconstitutional because it was built on existing harms created by the so-called Stop W.O.K.E. Act, which is currently blocked by federal courts.

There was another win on top of that: a Florida court severely limited the scope of the infamous Don't Say Gay Law. Here's some of what the State of Florida's concession in this historic agreement does:

- Restores the ability of students and teachers to speak freely about LGBTQ people, families, and issues in the classroom;
- States that the law does not prohibit books, musicals, or plays featuring LGBTQ characters;
- Reiterates that the law does not prohibit anti-bullying guidance or resources aimed at improving the mental and physical health of LGBTQ students;
- Clarifies that the law does not require the removal of safe space stickers or the elimination of safe spaces; and
- Protects GSAs (Gay-Straight Alliances/Genders-Sexualities Alliances) as an extracurricular activity.

It is not very often that I am able to breathe a sigh of relief when reading updates about LGBTQ+ policy in Florida. I am so proud that we at Keshet contributed to these momentous wins.