

2017 Big Night Out Remarks
By Tony Snell
City of Milwaukee ERC Commissioner

Thank you, Karen.

I bring you greetings from the City of Milwaukee Equal Rights Commission.

Bienvenidos a todos! Es una noche Buena! Una gran noche!

Big Night Out symbolizes a momentous time for some of us – making courageous decisions to let everyone know who we are, how we love, or how we express ourselves – but for others, this is a time of uncertainty, which may cause trepidation and even pain.

Uncertainty from one day to another punches people right in the gut: when service members are told that their patriotism has come into question and their service to country will no longer be needed; when the Department of Education rolls back sexual assault guidelines; when the U.S. Attorney General tells you that the Civil Rights Act no longer protects you from employment discrimination.

As a means to create solace and permanence, commissioners, staff, and community partners worked for months to modernize the city's non-discrimination ordinance, which the Common Council unanimously adopted just a few weeks ago.

I am happy to report that our new non-discrimination ordinance better protects **ALL** Milwaukeeans from unequal treatment, but also has particular significance for our community.

Our new ordinance extends its protection from discrimination in housing and employment to also include protection from discrimination in public accommodations – a right that transgender and non-binary individuals have **NEVER** had under state and federal law.

The new ordinance, and the Commission itself, is committed to filling the ever-widening gaps in legal protections for LGBTQ+ folks in this country.

In this case, our Commission benefited from the expertise and counsel of the Center's Transgender Resource Specialist, who provided invaluable, nuanced guidance about the City's trans community, its needs, and how it would be affected by proposed changes. Thank you, Shelley Gregory! The City has a better, more effective non-discrimination ordinance for their involvement, and we all owe a debt of gratitude to the Center for that outcome.

As we proceed with the implementation of the new ordinance, we will once again be depending on the Center's outreach and relationships to help us inform and educate the community at-large, assure victims that they have a place for remedy, and,

IMPORTANTLY, with building trust. We are counting on many of our partners to do the same: FORGE, Diverse and Resilient, ARCW, Cream City Foundation, the Fair Housing Council, the Wisconsin LGBT Chamber, and the County Human Rights Commission, chaired by Jason Rae.

We are **ALL** gathered here tonight for a cause that is greater than any one of us – not for ourselves – but instead for the tenant whose landlords evicted them because their legal name and pronouns do not match; for the individual facing a hostile working environment; for the person who was refused entry, participation, or services because of their gender.

Whether you live, visit, study, work, or do business in our great city, **WE** are here for you! All of us!

We are gathered here for a purpose that is greater than any one of us – and I thank you for that.