



# ADD ALL THREE Amend the EOA

Age | Health Conditions | LGBTI status



#SexualCultureofJustice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Angelique Nixon, Director

## CAISO Repeats Longstanding Call for the State to End Legal LGBTI Discrimination

In honour of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT) on May 17th, **CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice** calls on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to meet its human rights obligations to be as inclusive as possible and protect all people living in Trinidad and Tobago from harm and discrimination. We highlight the campaign to **Amend the Equal Opportunity Act to include LGBTI status** as necessary and long overdue. This is needed to offer protections for LGBTI+ persons with employment, housing, education and access to healthcare and other goods and services. This longstanding call for expanded protections started in 2011 and continues in our policy and legislative advocacy.

Notwithstanding the significance of Justice Rampersad's ruling in 2018 in *Jones v AG of Trinidad and Tobago*, the LGBTI+ community remains at risk of discrimination and violence. There is, to date, no legislation which explicitly offers protection on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. CAISO has been advocating for legislative changes, particularly of the Equal Opportunity Act, to expand protections for LGBTI+ people.

The Equal Opportunity Commission and Tribunal safeguard rights by receiving, conciliating, and adjudicating complaints of discrimination in accommodation, service provision, education and employment, on specific grounds. There is no cost or lawyer needed to file an EOC complaint. However, under the Act, the EOC can only receive complaints related to sex, race/ethnicity, disability, origin, religion and marital status.

Those facing unfair discrimination because of age, because of a health condition (e.g. someone living with HIV, cancer, diabetes, facing a complicated pregnancy, or recovering from COVID-19), or because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex (LGBTI+) are not accommodated by the equal opportunity machinery. As such, LGBTI+ people (because of their sexual orientation or gender identity) remain vulnerable to being discriminated against in relation to employment, housing, education, and when accessing goods or services such as health care.

The **Add All Three to the EOA Campaign** is a call by a broad coalition of organisations to add protections based on LGBTI status, as well as age and health conditions, to the 20-year-old law. The Equal Opportunity Commission has made similar recommendations since 2011. Expanding the law's protections to include overlooked groups has also been a recommendation of every major international human rights review that Trinidad & Tobago has undergone since 2000. Over 25 diverse domestic and regional groups have championed these legislative amendments in various ways over recent years.

**CAISO | sex & gender justice**

One Robinson Ville, Belmont, Port of Spain 240112, Trinidad & Tobago  
+1 (868) 732-3543 · [info@caisott.org](mailto:info@caisott.org) · [caisott.org](http://caisott.org)

The Attorney General recently announced, on March 4th, 2021, plans to make amendments to the EOA to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace, which we absolutely support and welcome. And on April 18, 2021, *Trinidad & Tobago Newsday* quoted EOC Chairman, Ian Roach, as saying that the AG is open to "doing what needs to be done" to address the different "spectrums of discrimination" that are permitted under the act. However, he was unsure of what language would be used to amend that flaw in the Act regarding the exclusion of sexual orientation.

We anxiously await long needed amendments that include LGBTI status among other needed additions for protection -- and we call upon Parliament to make this amendment a priority. We also support additional amendments already crafted and submitted by the EOC. We urge the Government to act quickly and offer protections for LGBTI people living in Trinidad and Tobago. This would be a powerful action to not only offer clear and needed protections but also affirm the human rights of LGBTI Trinbagonians.

CAISO also reminds the Government of the **2020 LGBTI Policy Agenda** (developed by Alliance for Justice and Diversity) which includes expanding protection against discrimination, as well as other important human rights issues and concerns. The Policy, launched in October 2020, includes 13 Action Points shared with all government ministries and agencies. These are specific calls to action to address the following concerns: *State Capacity and Training on Human Rights; Discrimination in and Access to Employment, Healthcare, Housing and Goods/Services; Poverty and Homelessness; Comprehensive Sex Education; Gender Based and LGBTI Violence and Policing; Legislative and Policy exclusions and blindspots*. The LGBTI Policy Agenda aims to direct the media, politicians, and other national stakeholders' attention towards issues that are most important for local LGBTI+ communities.

The Agenda's action points continue to guide our strategic plans for local activism and community organising. CAISO pledges to continue challenging harmful norms and stigmas in order to advance inclusion and protection for Trinidad and Tobago's LGBTI+ communities, as we fight for the right to live with dignity in all aspects of our lives and to be free of violence and discrimination. And we also celebrate the diversity of our communities and support our movements for sex and gender justice.

*The International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT), was created in 2004 to draw attention to the violence and discrimination experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex people and all other people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions, and sex characteristics. Spearheaded by Martiniquan Georges-Louis Tin, the date (May 17th) was specifically chosen to commemorate the World Health Organization's decision in 1990, to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder. First celebrated in Trinidad and Tobago in 2011, the day is marked in more than 130 countries. This year the global theme is "Together: Resisting, Supporting, Healing!"*

**CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice** is a feminist Civil Society Organisation committed to ensuring wholeness, justice and inclusion for Trinidad and Tobago's LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) communities, by developing analysis, alliances and advocacy. **For more info on the campaign or policy, visit [caisott.org](http://caisott.org) or email us at [info@caisott.org](mailto:info@caisott.org).**

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