



Tim Cook said he's gay. In 29 states, you could be fired for doing the same

By Claire Zillman

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On Thursday, Apple chief executive officer Tim Cook confirmed what had long been believed: he is a gay man.

[In coming out in Bloomberg Businessweek](#), Cook wrote, "Of course, I've had the good fortune to work at a company that loves creativity and innovation and knows it can only flourish when you embrace people's differences. Not everyone is so lucky."



That last statement is accurate, not just because of the prejudice that gay individuals face in their personal lives, but because of the lack of protections against the discrimination of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in the workplace.

[According to the American Civil Liberties Union](#), in 29 states workers can still be fired for saying exactly what Cook wrote Thursday. They include:

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- Florida

Georgia
Idaho
Indiana
Kansas
Kentucky
Louisiana
Michigan
Mississippi
Missouri
Montana
Nebraska
North Carolina
North Dakota
Ohio
Oklahoma
Pennsylvania
South Carolina
South Dakota
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
Virginia
West Virginia
Wyoming

Congress has failed to pass federal legislation that bans discrimination in the workplace based on sexual orientation and transgender identity outright. But politicians in Washington have [introduced legislation known as the Employment Non-Discrimination Act for two decades](#). And, for two decades, it has failed to pass.

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"When I talk about hot topics, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act is front and center. The President and The White House are making incremental steps to move us in that direction because there is no federal protection," says Selisse Berry, founder and chief executive officer of nonprofit advocacy organization Out & Equal.

In June, President Obama [signed an executive order banning workplace discrimination](#) based on employees' sexual orientation and gender identity among federal contractors. In September, [the EEOC filed its first lawsuits on behalf of transgender employees](#) under the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The business community in the U.S. is also doing its part to combat LGBT discrimination. Company by company, businesses have put sexual orientation and gender identify protections into their codes of conduct. "That way, people can come out at work and not be worried about being fired," Berry says.

"Ninety-one percent of Fortune 500 companies include sex orientation protections. Seventeen years ago, it was 5%. People weren't really talking it," she says. Today, 61% of [Fortune 500](#) companies include protection against gender identity bias.

The situation overseas, however, is significantly different. "There are 17 countries where [LGBT people] can be married," Berry notes, "but 75 where we can be imprisoned or killed as LGBT people."

<http://time.com/3549012/tim-cook-gay-america-fired/>