

housing, and public accommodations. Several staff and strategists from the successful Freedom to Marry campaign (which had just wound down) helped launch FFAA, aiming to “**adapt the multi-level and multi-prong strategies**” that won marriage equality toward a broader LGBTQ rights movement ⁵. FFAA’s **core mission** was to secure *explicit nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ Americans at every level – ultimately through a federal law – so that everyone is treated fairly and equally under the law* ^{1 2}. In simpler terms, the organization wanted to ensure that no one could be fired, denied housing, or refused service just because of who they are or whom they love.

From the start, FFAA defined itself as a **bipartisan, inclusive campaign**. The coalition brought together Republicans and Democrats, business leaders, people of faith, and grassroots activists, reflecting a strategy to make LGBTQ+ equality a shared American value rather than a partisan issue ^{1 6}. “*Our campaign efforts build off one of the most fundamental American values: that we all should be treated fairly and equally under the law,*” explained FFAA’s initial campaign manager Matt McTighe at the launch ⁷. The name “Freedom for All Americans” itself echoed broader ideals of liberty and justice, framing LGBTQ+ rights not as special interests but as part of America’s promise of freedom for everyone.

Why was this campaign needed? In 2015, a majority of U.S. states still did **not** have laws explicitly protecting LGBTQ+ people from discrimination. At FFAA’s founding, *52% of LGBTQ Americans lived in states lacking statewide nondiscrimination protections in jobs, housing, and public accommodations* ³. In fact, 33 states at the time had no comprehensive LGBT protections, leaving millions vulnerable to being fired or denied services simply for being gay or transgender. This uneven patchwork (see map above) created a pressing need for action. FFAA set out to “**remedy**” that by advancing laws in as many states as possible and, ultimately, pushing for a federal solution ^{8 9}. The *ultimate goal*, as the group stated, was “**securing federal statutory protections for LGBTQ Americans**”, while also working at the state and local levels in the meantime ¹⁰. Importantly, FFAA emphasized that new laws should not be undermined by broad loopholes: protections must be enacted “*without allowing overly broad and harmful religious exemptions*” that could enable discrimination in the name of religion ¹⁰. This stance set the tone for how FFAA balanced civil rights with religious freedom debates throughout its work.

Founding support: FFAA was not a typical single-organization effort, but rather a well-funded alliance of advocacy groups and donors spanning the political spectrum ¹¹. At its launch, it announced a **\$25 million bipartisan campaign** funded by prominent figures such as Republican philanthropist Paul Singer, Democratic philanthropist Tim Gill, hedge fund manager Daniel Loeb, and organizations including the American Unity Fund (a Republican pro-LGBTQ group) and the Gill Foundation ¹¹. This diverse backing signaled a unique coalition. The campaign’s formation right after *Obergefell* was also timed with political expectations: advocates anticipated a LGBTQ-friendly Clinton administration in 2017 to help advance nondiscrimination federally ^{12 4}. Instead, the surprise election of Donald Trump – whose administration would scale back some LGBTQ protections – meant FFAA’s planned “few-month” sprint became a much longer fight ⁴. “*As the sun set on Congress in 2022, so too it sets on FFAA’s campaign,*” the group later reflected, acknowledging how a campaign envisioned as brief had evolved into an eight-year endeavor ^{13 14}. Despite the change in political winds, FFAA resolved to forge ahead across the country rather than give up, driven by the conviction that **freedom from discrimination is a nonpartisan American ideal**.

Leadership and Organizational Structure

From its inception, Freedom for All Americans was led by experienced LGBTQ+ rights strategists who had cut their teeth in previous equality battles. **Matt McTighe** served as the initial campaign director of FFAA

¹⁵ . McTighe was a veteran organizer known for helping win marriage equality in Maine in 2012 and for his work on other state campaigns. At FFAA's launch in mid-2015, he became the public face and strategist of the campaign, traveling to help local efforts (such as the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance fight) and articulating the movement's messaging. McTighe often drew parallels between the nondiscrimination push and the earlier marriage fight – noting that it would take time, education, and personal stories to change hearts and minds, just as it did for marriage ¹⁵ ¹⁶ . Under his guidance, FFAA focused on **public education and story-telling** to counter opponents' fear-based narratives (for example, debunking the myth that protecting transgender people threatens others in restrooms) ¹⁷ ¹⁸ .

In late 2017, FFAA brought on **Masen Davis** as its new chief executive. Davis, a transgender man and longtime LGBTQ advocate, had previously led the Transgender Law Center and global trans rights initiatives ¹⁹ . He was hired as CEO on October 25, 2017 ²⁰ – exactly one year before the Los Angeles Blade interview excerpted here – to steer FFAA through a challenging political climate. Davis's appointment was itself significant: as a prominent transgender leader, his role underscored FFAA's commitment to ensuring transgender inclusion and visibility in the nondiscrimination fight. *"I joined FFAA to win strong, comprehensive protections for the most vulnerable members of our LGBTQ community,"* Davis said, emphasizing the need for smart strategy, staff, and resources to be a *"clutch player"* in the movement ²¹ . Under his tenure, FFAA doubled down on a 50-state strategy, working both **offensively** (passing pro-LGBTQ laws) and **defensively** (blocking anti-LGBTQ bills) as needed ²² . Davis highlighted that bringing people together across the aisle was *"not easy... but more important than ever,"* given growing polarization ²³ . He also helped develop new campaign tools and partnerships (discussed below) to amplify FFAA's impact even when operating behind the scenes.

By late 2019, a planned leadership transition took place. **Kasey Suffredini**, a seasoned LGBTQ+ rights strategist, was named the incoming CEO and national campaign director of Freedom for All Americans ²⁴ ²⁵ . Suffredini had been serving as FFAA's President of Strategy and was well-known for co-chairing the successful 2018 *Yes on 3* campaign in Massachusetts (which preserved transgender nondiscrimination protections at the ballot box) ²⁶ . He also had led MassEquality and worked for national LGBTQ organizations, bringing two decades of experience. Suffredini officially took the helm after Masen Davis stepped down in November 2019 ²⁴ . Under Suffredini's leadership, FFAA continued its bipartisan, multi-pronged approach. He was often described as the "chief architect" of campaigns that changed narratives and achieved policy wins through cross-partisan appeal ²⁷ ²⁸ . During Suffredini's tenure (2020–2022), FFAA concentrated on lobbying the U.S. Senate for the Equality Act while also navigating a surge of state-level anti-LGBTQ bills. He spearheaded initiatives like **"Conservatives Against Discrimination,"** reaching out to right-leaning Americans (more on this later) ²⁹ . Notably, Suffredini's background as an attorney and policy expert helped FFAA craft legislation without harmful loopholes and respond to complex legal debates over religious exemptions ³⁰ ³¹ .

Throughout its existence, FFAA functioned as both a **501(c)(4) advocacy campaign** (engaging in lobbying and political action) and a **501(c)(3) educational arm** known as the Freedom for All Americans Education Fund ³² . This dual structure is common in civil rights movements: the Education Fund focused on public education, storytelling, and coalition-building, while the main FFAA entity could directly push legislators and ballot measures. The two arms shared leadership and goals; for example, Matt McTighe and Masen Davis each led both the campaign and its education fund in their time ³³ . By 2021, FFAA had grown into a significant operation, with an annual revenue of over \$2.8 million (and its Education Fund raising about \$6.2 million that year) ³² . The organization maintained a modest public-facing profile (especially compared to giants like the Human Rights Campaign), often working in coordination with other groups rather than in the

limelight ³⁴ . Masen Davis acknowledged that much of FFAA's work was “background support” to amplify state and local partners, but he also noted efforts to increase the organization’s visibility so that LGBTQ people “*know who we are and what we do on their behalf.*” ³⁵ ³⁶ .

In summary, FFAA's leadership combined **veteran gay rights strategists and transgender advocates**, reflecting the campaign's inclusive ethos. They navigated the project from a hopeful post-marriage-equality boom, through defensive battles in the Trump years, and into renewed opportunities under a more friendly administration by 2021. Each leader – McTighe, Davis, Suffredini – contributed unique strengths, and together they built FFAA into a nimble coalition-builder and advocacy powerhouse dedicated to the cause of equal freedom.

Major Campaigns and Advocacy Initiatives

Freedom for All Americans engaged in a wide array of campaigns, initiatives, and actions to advance LGBTQ+ nondiscrimination protections. These efforts spanned **federal legislation, state and local policy fights, public education campaigns, and partnerships with various constituencies**. Below is a structured look at FFAA's main advocacy work:

Federal Focus: The Equality Act



Supporters rally for the Equality Act on Capitol Hill. Passing this comprehensive LGBTQ+ civil rights bill became FFAA's primary goal from 2015 onward, symbolizing the campaign's drive to ensure equal protection under law for LGBTQ Americans nationwide.

From day one, Freedom for All Americans set its sights on the passage of the **Equality Act**, a landmark federal bill that would add sexual orientation and gender identity to the nation's civil rights laws. This legislation, first introduced in 2015, would ban anti-LGBTQ discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, education, credit, and other areas – essentially filling the gaps in protections that existed

at the state level. FFAA described the Equality Act as the “*ultimate goal*” of its campaign ¹⁰, and it dedicated enormous energy and resources over eight years to lobbying for this bill.

Legislative journey: The Equality Act made historic progress during FFAA’s tenure, though it ultimately remained unpassed by the time FFAA disbanded. With FFAA’s advocacy and coalition-building support, the bill gained **bipartisan endorsements from businesses and lawmakers**. In **2019**, the Equality Act passed the U.S. House of Representatives for the first time ever ²⁹. This was a major milestone – a clear sign of momentum – and FFAA had worked hard to help achieve it, coordinating testimony, Republican support, and public pressure. However, the Senate (then controlled by leaders who opposed the bill) refused to take it up, and the effort stalled in that Congress. After the 2020 elections, hope was renewed: a more favorable Congress and White House meant the Equality Act was reintroduced in **February 2021** ³⁷. FFAA ramped up its campaign once more, as President Joe Biden had promised to sign the Act and Democrats controlled both chambers of Congress. The House quickly passed the Equality Act again in 2021, with FFAA and partner organizations actively whipping votes and public support ³⁷ ³⁸.

The toughest hurdle lay in the U.S. Senate, where a 60-vote supermajority would be needed to overcome a filibuster. Freedom for All Americans engaged in **intense negotiations and strategizing in the Senate** throughout 2021–2022. The organization’s leaders and allies held talks with key senators of both parties, trying to address concerns that were being raised (often by Republicans) about certain provisions. One sticking point that emerged was **opposition messaging around transgender athletes in youth sports**, which critics of the Equality Act amplified as a wedge issue ³⁹. FFAA and coalition partners had to counter this narrative, clarifying that the bill’s focus was on core nondiscrimination areas and that fears about sports were being distorted. “*The broad-based coalition supporting the Equality Act will proudly and loudly tell you that trans women are women... fairness has no asterisk,*” affirmed one advocate, pushing back against the idea of excluding transgender girls from protections ⁴⁰. FFAA stood firm that no carve-outs should be made that treat transgender Americans as second-class.

Throughout this period, FFAA coordinated a massive **grassroots and grasstops lobbying effort** for the Equality Act. This included mobilizing ordinary citizens to contact their senators, organizing business leaders and municipal officials to voice support, and ensuring that supportive Republicans were given a platform to speak out. For instance, FFAA’s *Conservatives Against Discrimination* project (detailed later) was launched to show that many on the political right also favored the bill’s passage ²⁹. Dozens of Fortune 500 companies and major employers had by then endorsed the Equality Act – a testament to years of work by FFAA and allies convincing corporate America that LGBTQ inclusion is both morally right and economically smart ⁴¹ ⁴². The campaign also uplifted voices of faith, military veterans, women’s groups, and others to testify that nondiscrimination is about basic dignity and consistent with American and religious values ²³ ⁴³.

Despite these Herculean efforts, the Equality Act **stalled in the Senate** by the end of 2022. A few moderate Republicans showed openness to some form of the bill, but not enough to reach the 60-vote threshold, especially amid an increasingly polarized climate over transgender issues. Senate opponents demanded religious exemptions or other changes that LGBTQ advocates found unacceptable. FFAA and a broad coalition of civil rights groups took a firm stance against “*watered-down*” compromises that would undermine existing civil rights laws. For example, when a Republican-led alternative called the “**Fairness for All Act**” was introduced – proposing to give LGBTQ protections but paired with sweeping religious carve-outs – FFAA joined fellow advocates in strongly criticizing it. “*The ‘Fairness for All’ Act is anything but fair... it creates substandard protections for LGBTQ people with massive loopholes,*” a coalition statement said, noting it would

even roll back some rights for women and people of color ⁴⁴. Both Freedom for All Americans and the Equality Federation (a network of state LGBTQ groups) objected to that bill's approach, although they expressed optimism that at least some conservatives now acknowledged the need for nondiscrimination laws – *"a good point from which to start"* a dialogue ⁴⁵. This episode illustrated FFAA's delicate balancing act: **welcoming Republicans to the table** to build bipartisan support, but **not at the expense of core protections** or by accepting an inferior bill.

By early 2023, with a new Congress in place, the Equality Act had not become law and faced an uncertain path. It was in this context that Freedom for All Americans made the difficult decision to wind down (as discussed in a later section on its disbandment and legacy). The Equality Act push is central to FFAA's legacy: the campaign significantly elevated the issue nationally, helping to achieve unprecedented victories (twice passing in the House) and forging a coalition that spanned the aisle. Advocates note that this groundwork will be invaluable when the "moment of next opportunity" arrives to finally enact federal LGBTQ protections ⁴⁶. Even without immediate victory, FFAA's federal advocacy cemented the idea that **LGBTQ rights are a fundamental part of American civil rights** – an idea supported by a majority of the public and many leaders, even if Congress lagged behind. As Senator Jeff Merkley, the bill's Senate sponsor, said in 2021, Americans gave a *"mandate to make this country a more equal and free place for everyone – including LGBTQ Americans"* ⁴⁷. That sentiment, which FFAA tirelessly promoted, remains a driving force in ongoing efforts for equality.

State and Local Battles: Advancing and Defending Protections

While the federal fight was prominent, FFAA was equally active on the **state and local level**, recognizing that progress often happens in states first and that many LGBTQ Americans needed protections closer to home. The organization engaged in campaigns in dozens of states, **supporting pro-LGBTQ legislation and combating anti-LGBTQ initiatives**. FFAA described this as engaging "in states across the country to advance nondiscrimination legislation and defeat anti-LGBT bills" ⁴⁸. Here are some of the key state/local battles and campaigns in which FFAA played a role:

- **Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO) – 2015:** Shortly after its founding, FFAA jumped in to help with the high-profile fight over Houston's Equal Rights Ordinance, a local law that protected LGBTQ people (among other groups) from discrimination. In November 2015, opponents forced HERO onto the ballot and ran a fear-based campaign (centered on false "bathroom predator" claims targeting transgender people). Despite support from celebrities and political figures, HERO was repealed by voters ⁴⁹. Matt McTighe and FFAA assisted the local pro-HERO campaign (Houston Unites) and, after the loss, stressed it as a **learning moment** rather than a permanent defeat ⁵⁰ ⁵¹. McTighe noted the situation was akin to early losses in the marriage movement: *"We knew we were onto something... but it was going to take more time"* ¹⁵. The lesson FFAA took was that extensive public education was needed to dispel myths and personal stories could change minds about why these laws are necessary ¹⁷. This foreshadowed FFAA's strategy in subsequent fights: regroup, refine messaging, and try again.
- **Indiana and the "Religious Freedom" debate – 2015:** In early 2015, Indiana ignited controversy by passing a Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) seen as potentially allowing businesses to refuse service to LGBTQ people. The backlash from businesses and civil rights groups was swift, forcing Indiana's government to pass a "fix" clarifying the RFRA couldn't undermine local nondiscrimination laws. Freedom for All Americans highlighted such instances to show the economic and reputational

harm of anti-LGBT laws ⁴¹ . By the time of FFAA's launch that summer, they proudly noted the campaign had *"already assisted with recent efforts in Indiana"* as well as other states ⁵² . This likely refers to coordinating national pressure and sharing expertise to combat discriminatory bills. Indiana became a cautionary tale FFAA used when lobbying other states: **protecting LGBTQ people is good for business and the community, whereas discrimination backfires** ⁴¹ .

- **Utah Compromise – 2015:** Utah was a unique bright spot in 2015. That March, Utah passed a bipartisan law (often called the "Utah compromise") adding sexual orientation and gender identity to statewide nondiscrimination protections in employment and housing, while carving out certain religious exemptions. This law had the support of the Mormon Church and conservative lawmakers, and was touted as a model of finding common ground. FFAA promoted examples like Utah to demonstrate that red states *could* embrace LGBTQ protections with the right coalition. Indeed, the *Fairness for All Act* proposed in Congress years later was explicitly based on Utah's approach ⁵³ (though FFAA did not endorse the federal version due to its broader exemptions). Still, Utah's case showed FFAA's strategy of engaging people of faith and Republicans was viable. According to FFAA, their campaign *"will engage states across the country, particularly states with large LGBT populations and few protections,"* and Utah was one early success to build on ⁵⁴ .

- **North Carolina's HB2 "Bathroom Bill" – 2016:** In 2016, North Carolina passed HB2, a notorious law that *mandated discrimination* against transgender people in public restrooms and barred cities from protecting LGBTQ citizens. FFAA joined the nationwide outcry against HB2, working with businesses and local advocates to push for repeal. They highlighted how **hostile laws hurt a state's bottom line**, citing how companies like PayPal and Deutsche Bank froze expansion plans in NC after HB2 ⁴¹ . FFAA's Education Fund partnered in projects like a groundbreaking national TV ad to humanize transgender people in the restroom debate (see Public Education section below) ⁵⁵ ³³ . Ultimately, partial repeal of HB2 was achieved in 2017, though North Carolina remains without full protections. FFAA's involvement in the HB2 fight reinforced its role as a defender when LGBTQ rights came under attack, not just an advocate when new laws were proposed.

- **Massachusetts "Yes on 3" – 2018:** One of FFAA's most celebrated victories came in Massachusetts. In 2016, Massachusetts had passed a law protecting transgender people from discrimination in public spaces. Anti-transgender opponents gathered signatures to repeal that law via a statewide referendum in November 2018. Freedom for All Americans threw its weight behind the *Yes on 3* campaign (Yes on 3 urged voters to uphold the law). Kasey Suffredini of FFAA served as campaign co-chair ⁵⁶ , and FFAA contributed strategic guidance, fundraising, and on-the-ground support. The result was a **landslide win**: Massachusetts voters upheld transgender protections by a nearly 68–32% margin ²⁶ , marking the **first time transgender rights were affirmed at the ballot by popular vote**. This victory was a huge morale boost for the movement, and Suffredini's leadership in it earned national recognition. It showcased FFAA's ability to orchestrate bipartisan messaging – even many conservatives in Massachusetts were persuaded that protecting trans neighbors was about treating people fairly. The campaign's success also proved that the public, when informed, rejects the scare tactics used by anti-LGBTQ activists. FFAA highlighted this as a *"national first"* and evidence that hearts and minds can be changed on transgender equality ²⁶ ²⁸ .

- **New Hampshire and Anchorage – 2018:** In the same timeframe, FFAA was deeply involved in other local fights. Masen Davis noted that in **Anchorage, Alaska**, they helped defeat a discriminatory bathroom measure (Proposition 1) at the ballot in April 2018 ²² . And in **New Hampshire**, FFAA was

a “prominent partner” in the successful campaign to pass a transgender nondiscrimination law in 2018 ²² ⁵⁷ . Notably, New Hampshire’s Republican-controlled legislature passed those protections – the first time a GOP-led state did so – illustrating FFAA’s bipartisan influence. Davis credited tactics like centering trans voices, amplifying women’s and business support, and directly countering opponents’ messages for these wins ²² . Victories in conservative areas like Anchorage and New Hampshire gave the movement a “*clearer playbook for success*” and proved that even in challenging environments, progress was possible with smart strategy ⁵⁸ .

- **Virginia, Michigan, and others – 2020s:** FFAA also eyed states where political shifts opened new possibilities. In **Virginia**, for example, the 2019 state elections flipped the legislature to pro-equality control, and in early 2020 Virginia passed a comprehensive LGBTQ nondiscrimination law (the Virginia Values Act). Freedom for All Americans celebrated and likely supported this effort; indeed, Suffredini was quoted saying “*a welcoming Virginia is crucial to economic competitiveness*” as Virginia lawmakers considered the bill ⁵⁹ . In **Michigan**, FFAA had long backed efforts to add LGBTQ protections to the state civil rights law. That finally succeeded in 2023 (after FFAA’s closure, Michigan’s legislature passed the expansion), but FFAA’s years of groundwork with local partners contributed to building bipartisan business and voter support there. Other states that advanced protections during FFAA’s active years include Delaware, New Mexico, and Wisconsin (updating old laws), often with FFAA’s quiet assistance in the background. By 2022, thanks to cumulative state gains, the proportion of Americans in states without LGBTQ protections had dropped considerably – yet *nearly 30% of Americans still lived in states where a person could be denied housing for being LGBTQ*, underscoring the continued need for a federal law ⁶⁰ .

- **Blocking anti-LGBTQ bills:** On the defensive side, FFAA helped coordinate opposition to the growing wave of anti-LGBTQ bills in state legislatures, particularly after 2016. This included so-called “**bathroom bills**” (like those proposed in Texas and other states to bar transgender restroom access), “**license to discriminate**” laws cloaked as religious liberty, and more recently, bills restricting transgender youth in sports or healthcare. In 2017, for instance, FFAA was active in Texas, where a high-profile bathroom bill was introduced. FFAA harnessed corporate voices – from Apple to Facebook to Walmart – to warn Texas lawmakers that anti-LGBTQ policies would hurt the state’s economy and reputation ⁴¹ . The Texas bill was ultimately blocked that year, in part due to pressure from businesses and civic leaders. Each year, FFAA tracked these legislative threats closely. In fact, it launched a public **Legislative Tracker** to monitor all anti-LGBTQ bills, partnering with the Equality Federation to keep advocates informed ⁶¹ . By sharing information and strategy across states, FFAA helped many local coalitions stop discriminatory bills before they became law. Not all were prevented – for example, recent years saw some states pass bans on transgender students in sports or gender-affirming care – but the presence of a national coordinating campaign meant lessons learned in one state could be quickly deployed in another. Advocates often credit FFAA’s coordination with contributing to “*the bulk of anti-LGBT bills*” failing in certain years ⁶² .

The breadth of FFAA’s state and local engagement speaks to its **role as a connective tissue in the LGBTQ+ movement**. Rather than replace local efforts, FFAA amplified them – providing funding, advertising, training, and strategic advice to campaigns on the ground ³⁵ ⁶³ . For example, FFAA’s “**Freedom New Hampshire**” initiative helped galvanize national support to push New Hampshire’s bill “*over the finish line*,” as Masen Davis described ⁶³ . Similarly, the “**America Competes**” program referenced by Davis brought together top companies in a coalition to support state business coalitions on LGBTQ issues ⁶⁴ . This synergy allowed local advocates to punch above their weight by leveraging nationwide resources. The result

was a series of **milestone victories** (trans protections upheld by voters, new red-state laws, etc.) as well as a strong defense that blunted the force of anti-LGBTQ attacks in many instances. Each state win also provided compelling evidence when making the case federally: FFAA could point to conservative states that had adopted protections and to popular votes that affirmed inclusion, showing members of Congress that the country was ready for nationwide nondiscrimination.

Public Education, Storytelling, and Outreach Campaigns

A key aspect of Freedom for All Americans' work was shaping public opinion and **educating Americans** about LGBTQ+ people and the need for equal protections. Recognizing that legal change is often preceded by cultural change, FFAA invested in outreach initiatives to win hearts and minds. Here are some of the ways FFAA influenced the public narrative:

- **National TV Ad – 2016 (FairnessUSA):** In July 2016, FFAA's Education Fund led a coalition to produce the *first-ever national television ad* depicting the challenges of anti-transgender discrimination ⁵⁵. The powerful 60-second ad features a transgender woman in North Carolina who is unable to use the appropriate restroom due to HB2, highlighting the humiliation and harm caused by such laws ⁶⁵. What made this campaign especially noteworthy was its strategic airtime: the ad debuted on **FOX News Channel during the Republican National Convention**, and later on MSNBC during the Democratic convention ⁵⁵. By playing during these high-profile political events, the ad reached millions across the political spectrum, directly addressing misconceptions in a relatable way. *"Many people have never met a transgender person... We decided to produce this ad to show that transgender Texans are our coworkers, neighbors, friends and family,"* explained one partner from Equality Texas ⁶⁶. Matt McTighe, then executive director of FFAA's Education Fund, stated the goal plainly: *"No one should be banned from something as basic as using the restroom. We hope this ad helps educate the millions... who have not yet had an opportunity to meet a transgender person."* ³³. This ad was funded by **FairnessUSA**, a partnership led by FFAA Education Fund along with groups like the Movement Advancement Project (MAP), National Center for Transgender Equality, and others ⁶⁷. It was a prime example of FFAA's ability to convene allies and craft a unified message. The **impact** was significant – the ad garnered national media attention and sympathy by putting a human face on an abstract issue, helping undercut the fearmongering of anti-trans campaigns.
- **"Faces of Freedom" Storytelling Hub:** Understanding the power of personal stories, FFAA created a platform called **Faces of Freedom** to share testimonials from diverse individuals about why nondiscrimination matters ⁶⁴. This online storytelling hub housed profiles of LGBTQ people and allies (including unexpected supporters like conservative community members, faith leaders, and safety officials) who spoke up for equality. By amplifying these narratives, FFAA aimed to show that *"our community's diverse coalition of allies"* supports nondiscrimination and to put familiar, relatable faces to the issue ³⁵ ⁶⁸. These stories were used in social media campaigns, local media outreach, and as testimony in legislative hearings. For instance, a small business owner in a conservative town explaining how an inclusive law helped his business could sway a wavering lawmaker more than statistics might. FFAA's emphasis on storytelling was rooted in a lesson from the marriage fight: stories change votes. As Masen Davis noted, part of FFAA's mission was to *"build the national narrative of growing support"* by sharing stories of "unexpected allies" from all walks of life ³⁵. This not only humanized LGBTQ people, but also gave cover to politicians (particularly Republicans) to support equality by showing them that many of their constituents – even churchgoers, veterans, or parents – were on board.

- **Mayors Against LGBT Discrimination – launched 2017:** One of FFAA's signature initiatives was convening local elected leaders to speak out. In January 2017, at the dawn of the Trump administration, FFAA helped launch **Mayors Against LGBT Discrimination**, a nonpartisan coalition of city mayors committed to fighting anti-LGBT bias ⁶⁹ ⁷⁰. The coalition started with **175 mayors** from cities across America – from big metropolitan mayors to small-town leaders – signaling broad geographic support for LGBTQ inclusion ⁷¹. San Francisco's Ed Lee, Philadelphia's Jim Kenney, and Seattle's Ed Murray served as co-chairs, and they spoke about ensuring all residents feel safe and welcomed in their cities ⁷². Matt McTighe of FFAA coordinated this initiative, underscoring the statistic that *"in 32 states [then], LGBT people still lack comprehensive protections"*, which mayors feel at the frontlines when discrimination occurs in their communities ⁷³. The mayors' coalition provided a powerful voice against state-level anti-LGBT measures – for example, mayors could collectively oppose something like HB2 or urge their state legislatures to pass nondiscrimination laws. It also enabled peer learning: mayors shared policies they enacted via executive orders or city ordinances to protect LGBTQ citizens ⁷⁴. For FFAA, the message was that *local leaders of both parties* see nondiscrimination as essential for thriving communities. This undercut the argument that LGBTQ rights were only a coastal or partisan concern. Over time, more mayors joined the coalition, and they became vocal supporters of the federal Equality Act as well, bringing Main Street credibility to the cause.
- **Business Engagement – "America Competes":** FFAA strategically mobilized the business community's influence, knowing that lawmakers (especially pro-business conservatives) listen to employers. The campaign worked closely with major companies and local business coalitions. It often highlighted that **"laws that protect LGBT Americans from discrimination are good for business"**, as philanthropist Tim Gill put it ⁷⁵. FFAA's efforts included a program referred to as **"America Competes"**, which acted as *"connective tissue between Fortune 500 companies who want to engage in LGBTQ advocacy and the state business coalitions on the front lines."* ⁶⁴ In practice, this meant if a nondiscrimination bill was being considered in, say, Ohio or Florida, FFAA could help coordinate letters or testimony from large employers with a presence in that state, demonstrating economic support. Additionally, after high-profile controversies like Indiana's RFRA or North Carolina's HB2, FFAA made sure those cautionary tales of business backlash were well known in other state capitols ⁴¹. The campaign also partnered with groups like the **U.S. Chamber of Commerce and local chambers**, showing that economic development and inclusive laws go hand in hand. By 2021, more than 400 leading companies had endorsed the Equality Act, from tech giants to automotive companies – an outcome FFAA and its allies actively cultivated. This broad corporate support gave cover to moderate Republicans and was frequently cited in hearings and debates.
- **Conservatives Against Discrimination – launched 2021:** To further solidify bipartisan backing, Freedom for All Americans launched a campaign specifically targeting conservative audiences. In 2021, with support from a \$1 million grant by the Gill Foundation, FFAA rolled out **"Conservatives Against Discrimination."** ²⁹ This initiative was not tied to a single bill but aimed at raising general awareness among conservative and center-right Americans that LGBTQ nondiscrimination is about core freedoms and values. It likely involved outreach through conservative media, testimonials from Republican officials or faith conservatives who support protections, and messaging that aligned equality with principles like individual liberty and limited government intrusion. The fact that Gill (a Democratic-leaning funder) invested in this suggests confidence in FFAA's ability to move the needle on the right. By amplifying voices like that of **Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (a Florida Republican with a trans son)** or **Senator Rob Portman (a Republican with a gay son)**, FFAA

showed that conservative support is both possible and happening ⁴². They also highlighted Republicans such as **Governor Charlie Baker of Massachusetts**, who signed a transgender rights bill, and even cited instances like *Senator Orrin Hatch's defense of transgender service members* in 2017 ^{76 77}. The message: supporting LGBTQ freedom is consistent with conservative family and freedom values. Over time, this quiet persuasion helped increase GOP yes votes on state bills and maintain the small but important bloc of Republican members of Congress in favor of the Equality Act. It also perhaps blunted the vehemence of some opposition by showing that equality advocates weren't demonizing religious Americans but seeking common-ground fairness.

- **Faith Leaders Outreach:** Though not a formal branded campaign, FFAA consistently engaged communities of faith. They worked with organizations like the Interfaith Alliance and faith leaders who believed in equality. For example, Rabbi Jack Moline of the Interfaith Alliance criticized broad religious exemption bills as betraying American principles, stating *"to allow private beliefs to compromise the rights of other citizens... is a violation of the Constitution"* ⁴³. FFAA lifted up such faith voices to counter the narrative that LGBTQ rights and religion are at odds. Many clergy and faithful laypeople participated in FFAA's storytelling campaigns, emphasizing shared values of love, justice, and treating others as one would want to be treated. This approach helped neutralize the argument from opponents that nondiscrimination laws would trample religion – showing instead that many religious Americans *support* these laws. It also helped advocate for narrower religious exemptions that balance rights, rather than overly broad ones.
- **Tools and Research:** FFAA developed practical tools like the **Legislative Tracker** (mentioned earlier) and a **Litigation Tracker** to follow key court cases impacting LGBTQ rights ⁶⁴. By tracking litigation, they kept an eye on lawsuits like the Masterpiece Cakeshop case (which dealt with a business denying service to a gay couple) and the trio of employment discrimination cases that led to the Supreme Court's **Bostock v. Clayton County** decision in 2020. When the Supreme Court in *Bostock* ruled that existing federal sex-discrimination law covers LGBTQ employees, FFAA heralded it as a major step – but also used it to remind the public that comprehensive protections were still needed (since *Bostock* only covered workplaces) ⁶⁰. FFAA's communications often explained these complex legal developments in accessible terms, keeping supporters informed and ready to act. On their website and materials, they provided educational explainers (for instance, clarifying what the Equality Act would and wouldn't do, to dispel misinformation). All this contributed to FFAA's broader **public influence**, which was about making LGBTQ nondiscrimination a familiar, mainstream issue rather than a niche or scary topic.

Through these various outreach endeavors, Freedom for All Americans significantly **shifted the public discourse** on LGBTQ rights between 2015 and 2023. Polls during this period showed growing support for LGBTQ nondiscrimination protections, consistently around 70% of Americans in favor – including majorities of Republicans. FFAA can't take sole credit for that, but it was undoubtedly a driving force behind normalizing the idea that *"everyone should be treated fairly and equally"* (a phrase that became a mantra in their messaging) ⁷. By putting real people's faces to the cause, leveraging respected voices like mayors and CEOs, and directly confronting opponents' narratives with facts and stories, FFAA helped build a broad consensus that **LGBTQ freedom is an American value**. This broad public support remains one of the campaign's most important legacies, as it creates an environment in which future legal wins – at both the state and federal level – are not a question of "if" but "when."

Impact on LGBTQ+ Rights and Broader Freedoms

Freedom for All Americans had a meaningful impact on LGBTQ+ rights in the United States, even though its ultimate goal (a federal law) was not achieved during its years of operation. The campaign's influence can be seen in tangible policy outcomes, the strengthening of the LGBTQ movement, and the reframing of the fight for equality as part of the broader American struggle for freedom and justice.

Policy advancements: During FFAA's active years (2015–2023), numerous states and localities **enacted new LGBTQ+ protections**, reducing the number of unprotected states significantly. When FFAA began, only 18 states had full nondiscrimination laws covering LGBTQ people; by 2023, that number had grown to at least 22 states (plus additional states with partial protections, such as for sexual orientation only). States like **Virginia (2020)** and **Michigan (2023)** moved from no protections to comprehensive laws – a shift that advocates attribute in part to years of behind-the-scenes work by campaigns like FFAA to build coalitions and public demand. FFAA's assistance in winning the *first statewide transgender protections by popular vote* (Massachusetts), as well as facilitating *first-in-the-nation bipartisan wins* (e.g. New Hampshire's GOP-led legislature passing trans rights), are landmark achievements. These wins not only improved life for LGBTQ residents in those states but also **created models and momentum** for other states. Each successful campaign demonstrated strategies that could be replicated and undermined opponents' talking points (for example, showing that protecting trans people did *not* lead to any of the negative consequences opponents predicted).

Defensive successes: Equally important, FFAA's coordination helped **defeat or mitigate dozens of anti-LGBTQ bills** that could have rolled back freedoms. In 2016, over 200 anti-LGBT bills were introduced across states ⁷⁸ – a number that has continued to challenge activists every year. Many of these proposals, especially in earlier years, failed to pass, or were significantly scaled down, due to organized pushback. Advocates note that in 2015 and 2016, *“the bulk of anti-LGBT bills... failed to gain enough traction for passage”* ⁶², which can be credited to rapid-response campaigns by groups like FFAA working with local partners. By providing resources and a unified strategy, FFAA helped small state organizations not feel alone against well-funded opposition. For example, Texas in 2017 was poised to enact a bathroom ban, but a coalition including businesses and conservative voices – exactly the groups FFAA focused on mobilizing – stopped it. Such outcomes **protected the status quo or existing rights** in states with hostile governments, preventing backward movement. This is a significant impact: preserving freedom where it might have been curtailed.

Federal progress (short of passage): Though the Equality Act did not become law, FFAA's work was instrumental in elevating the issue to the highest levels of national discussion. Prior to FFAA, a comprehensive LGBTQ civil rights law had never even received a vote in Congress. Under FFAA's coalition, it passed the U.S. House twice – in **2019** and **2021** ²⁹ – and came closer than ever in the Senate. The fact that a sitting U.S. president (Biden) prioritized the Equality Act in campaign promises and that Democratic leadership fast-tracked it to a vote in 2021 ⁷⁹ reflects the influence of FFAA and allied advocacy making it a political priority. Moreover, FFAA's insistence on full protections without broad exemptions held the line on what the community expects from any eventual law ⁴⁴. The robust debate sparked by FFAA's push arguably also laid the groundwork for other federal actions – for instance, the Supreme Court's *Bostock* ruling in 2020 can be seen as aligned with the growing understanding (promoted by FFAA) that anti-LGBTQ discrimination is fundamentally sex discrimination and wrong ⁶⁰. Additionally, in late 2022, Congress did pass the **Respect for Marriage Act** (to protect same-sex marriage recognition) with bipartisan support. While that's

a different issue, some of the bipartisan networks and goodwill FFAA built may have carried over to make that possible, and it showed that progress on LGBTQ rights at the federal level is achievable step by step.

Broadening the freedom narrative: FFAA explicitly framed LGBTQ nondiscrimination as part of “**freedom for all Americans**”, linking it to the nation’s broader ideals of liberty, equality, and opportunity. This framing had an impact on how the public and policymakers view LGBTQ rights. Rather than seeing it as special treatment for a minority, more people came to see it as ensuring every American can “*live according to their truth, free from bias and prejudice*,” as FFAA’s mission stated ⁸⁰. By invoking shared American values – fairness, working hard and succeeding without facing discrimination ⁷ – FFAA’s messaging resonated beyond the LGBTQ community. This likely helped reduce backlash and increase consensus. Even opponents had to shift tactics; unable to openly oppose “freedom and fairness,” they resorted to invented issues like trans sports, indicating that FFAA’s approach had made direct homophobia/transphobia far less palatable publicly.

Furthermore, FFAA took care to integrate **intersectional perspectives** in its advocacy, stressing that nondiscrimination protections serve *everyone*. For example, in criticizing the weaker “Fairness for All” proposal, FFAA pointed out it could double-damage those at multiple intersections (like a Black transgender woman) by eroding existing race or religion protections in the name of new exemptions ⁸¹. This underscores a principle that strengthening nondiscrimination for one group reinforces the culture of freedom for all groups. In that sense, FFAA’s work was **tied to the broader civil rights continuum** – collaborating with racial justice, women’s rights, and religious liberty advocates to uphold a robust framework where no one’s rights override another’s. The organization drew a clear line that *religious freedom should not be misused as a weapon to deny others’ freedom* ⁴³. This stance contributed to the national conversation about where to draw the line on religious exemptions. Notably, while contentious, even some conservative courts and legislators have begun acknowledging that balance (for instance, the narrow ruling in the Masterpiece Cakeshop case in 2018 did not create a broad right to discriminate, and subsequent cases have grappled with striking a balance). FFAA’s educational efforts likely informed these outcomes by promoting understanding that **true religious liberty and LGBTQ equality can coexist**, but one cannot swallow the other.

Public opinion and normalization: By the time FFAA concluded, support for LGBTQ nondiscrimination laws was at an all-time high. Consistent polling shows around 7 in 10 Americans believe such protections already exist or should exist. The issue became relatively **non-controversial among the general public**, even as it remained politicized in certain legislatures. This normalization is a huge shift from a decade prior, and it is in part thanks to FFAA’s persistent public education and coalition work. The sight of Republican mayors and pastors standing with LGBTQ activists, or Fortune 500 CEOs and local shop owners alike saying “discrimination is not who we are,” sent a powerful message that **equality is mainstream**. FFAA’s communications also gave LGBTQ individuals and allies in conservative areas more confidence and visibility. Many individuals who might have stayed silent saw high-profile figures in their community join FFAA initiatives and felt empowered to speak up as well. This cumulative effect strengthens democratic engagement and the social fabric, as more Americans, gay and straight, become stakeholders in protecting each other’s freedoms.

Movement capacity: Internally, FFAA’s influence on the LGBTQ advocacy world was significant. It pioneered a model of a nimble campaign that wasn’t a single organization but an alliance that could plug into many efforts. It emphasized training and developing new leaders through programs like “LGBT-U” (an initiative FFAA announced to “*train and deploy the next generation of campaign staffers and movement leaders*” ⁸²). It

also actively **centered transgender leadership** at a time when trans rights were often underrepresented – hiring trans staff, elevating trans spokespeople nationally ⁸² . This contributed to a shift where transgender issues moved to the forefront of LGBTQ advocacy post-marriage. The strategies FFAA used – data-driven messaging, bipartisan coalition-building, digital tools like trackers – have become standard in how equality campaigns operate. In that sense, FFAA left behind a stronger, smarter movement infrastructure. Its decision upon closing to **redistribute remaining funds to other legacy LGBTQ organizations** further invested in the movement's future ³² . That funding boost (several million dollars) to groups like state equality organizations, and national ones, was aimed at ensuring the fight carries on even without FFAA's banner.

To summarize impact: FFAA helped **win new rights for millions of Americans**, prevented harm by stopping discriminatory laws, broadened the coalition of support for LGBTQ equality, and reframed the issue as one of basic American freedom and fairness. The campaign's work resonates beyond LGBTQ rights, reinforcing the principle that *civil rights are indivisible and must include everyone*. As a result of FFAA and similar efforts, LGBTQ Americans in many places today enjoy protections that were once thought out of reach, and even in places where legal equality is lagging, they have more allies and validation than ever before. The trajectory of progress, while not without setbacks, bent decidedly toward justice in FFAA's era – fulfilling, at least in part, the promise of “**freedom for all.**”

Criticisms and Controversies

Throughout its existence, Freedom for All Americans mostly maintained a positive reputation in the LGBTQ+ advocacy world, but it faced its share of **challenges, criticisms, and controversies** common to any campaign operating in a heated political arena. Below we examine a few such points of contention:

1. Opposition from Social Conservatives: As expected for an LGBTQ rights initiative, FFAA was frequently **criticized by opponents on the religious right and social conservative groups**. Organizations and individuals who opposed expanding LGBTQ protections often framed FFAA's efforts as threats to religious liberty or traditional values. For example, when the Equality Act gained momentum, critics like the Heritage Foundation vehemently opposed it, arguing it would force people to violate religious beliefs or undermine women's privacy (claims widely disputed by experts). During congressional debates, some Republican politicians attacked the Equality Act using **culture-war rhetoric** – Senator Rand Paul called the inclusion of trans youth “bizarre” in a hearing, and Republican figure Nikki Haley penned an op-ed against the bill ³⁹ . These detractors often conflated FFAA's nondiscrimination agenda with unrelated issues or worst-case hypotheticals (such as transgender sports or locker room scenarios) to stoke public fear. Freedom for All Americans had to constantly rebut these accusations. It stressed that *allowing LGBTQ people to work and live free from discrimination harms no one*, and that religious freedoms were already well-protected in law ⁸³ . Moreover, FFAA pointed to the many faith leaders who supported nondiscrimination to refute the narrative that it was “anti-religious” ⁴³ . Nevertheless, the **opposition's campaigns did create controversy**; in states like Texas and North Carolina, battles over bathroom access and religious exceptions became front-page news. FFAA, by taking a firm stance for transgender inclusion and minimal exemptions, sometimes found itself targeted by name in right-wing media as pushing a “radical agenda.” These controversies were not due to misconduct by FFAA, but rather ideological clashes inherent in its mission.

2. Balancing Religious Liberty and LGBTQ Rights: Within the more moderate and even supportive circles, there was a **debate about how to handle religious exemptions** in nondiscrimination laws. FFAA adopted a position of opposing overly broad exemptions – believing that civil rights laws must apply uniformly to truly

protect everyone ¹⁰ . Some critics, however, including a minority of LGBTQ allies and certain centrist politicians, argued that a federal bill might only pass if compromises were made, such as carving out specific protections for religious organizations. This came to a head with the introduction of the *Fairness for All Act* by some Republican lawmakers (with backing from the LDS Church). That bill essentially said: protect LGBTQ people in many settings, but give wide leeway to small businesses, religious nonprofits, and even some for-profit providers to refuse service based on religion ⁸⁴ ⁸⁵ . Freedom for All Americans publicly **criticized the Fairness for All Act**, calling it “an affront to existing civil rights protections” that would create a “different system of protections” just for LGBTQ people – effectively making them second-class ⁴⁴ . FFAA and most major LGBTQ organizations stood united against that approach, insisting that the “right balance” between religious freedom and nondiscrimination was already struck by decades of civil rights law ⁸⁶ . This principled stance drew some criticism from those who felt “perfect was the enemy of good”. A few commentators wondered if FFAA’s hard line might foreclose a possible compromise that could get some Republican votes. On the flip side, had FFAA endorsed a compromise like Fairness for All, it would have faced outrage from the LGBTQ community for selling short their rights. This delicate controversy underscored FFAA’s challenge: *how far to bend to achieve bipartisan support*. In practice, FFAA tried to thread the needle – praising the acknowledgment of the issue by conservatives ⁴⁵ , but standing firm that any law must **truly be equal**. This debate remains unresolved, but FFAA’s stance aligned with most civil rights advocates who argue that religious beliefs should not justify discrimination in the public sphere ⁴³ .

3. Bipartisan Strategy Scrutiny: Internally within the LGBTQ advocacy world, **FFAA’s bipartisan, incremental strategy** sometimes drew skepticism. As Masen Davis noted, “*working in a truly bipartisan manner isn’t easy or popular*” in today’s environment ⁸⁷ . Some activists on the left mistrust Republican involvement, worrying that emphasizing bipartisan appeal could lead to watering down demands or giving undue credit to officials who only mildly support LGBTQ rights. FFAA’s coalition included GOP donors (like Paul Singer) and showcased Republican officials who supported nondiscrimination. While this was largely seen as smart politics, a fringe of progressives might have viewed it with suspicion: Was FFAA too cozy with moderate Republicans? Did it pull punches in criticism to keep bipartisanship alive? There’s no clear evidence that FFAA compromised its values – in fact, it held a firm line on no broad exemptions – but in the polarized Trump era, any outreach to the GOP could be controversial in LGBTQ circles. For example, the **Log Cabin Republicans** (an LGBTQ Republican group) were part of the broader coalition for nondiscrimination; some queer activists question working with anyone affiliated with a party whose majority still opposed many LGBTQ rights at the time. FFAA tried to answer this by pointing to results: “*27 of the states without explicit LGBTQ protections are controlled by Republicans, and we can’t give up on those states,*” Davis explained ⁸⁷ . In other words, bipartisanship wasn’t just a feel-good slogan but a necessity to win in many regions. While most advocates accepted this logic, occasional criticism came up that maybe a more aggressive, partisan push (relying on Democratic dominance) could have achieved more, especially when Democrats had full federal control in 2021-22 and still didn’t pass the Equality Act. There’s no consensus on this, and it remains a strategic question for the movement.

4. Quiet Disbandment and Questions of Efficacy: A final point of controversy emerged at the end of FFAA’s life. In April 2023, news broke that **Freedom for All Americans was quietly disbanding after eight years** ¹³ ⁸⁸ . The organization announced on its website and social media that “*since 2015, [FFAA] has played an important role in the LGBTQ movement. And now our time has come to an end.*” ⁸⁹ It noted many successes and expressed hope for the future, then shuttered operations. The abrupt closure – especially when the Equality Act was still pending and a wave of anti-LGBTQ bills was cresting in states – raised concern among some community members. Why disband now? Did it signal a sense of defeat? Some critics might say the campaign **failed to accomplish its main objective** (federal law) and ended prematurely. The

19th News reported that FFAA was launched expecting a short campaign under a friendly administration, but instead faced a hostile one and a stalled dream that has taken “49 years” (since the first federal equality bill was introduced) ¹³ ⁸⁸. In that light, FFAA's end could be seen as a sobering acknowledgment of Washington gridlock. On the other hand, many leaders in the movement defended the move as strategic: FFAA had built a strong framework, and by winding down, it could transfer resources to long-established groups to continue the work ³². The statement from FFAA hinted at this, saying it hoped others would “take the relationships and coordinating structures that were built and leverage them” going forward ⁴⁶. Indeed, initiatives started by FFAA (like the mayors’ coalition or conservative outreach) can live on under different auspices. But for observers, the controversy (or at least debate) here lies in **what the closure means**. Some might critique that it left a gap in coordination exactly when a united front is needed against unprecedented anti-transgender legislative attacks in 2023. Others might argue that FFAA's core mission – nondiscrimination – is now so widely shared among LGBTQ organizations that a separate entity isn't necessary. In any case, transparency was limited; FFAA's team declined interviews at the time of closure ⁹⁰, which led to some community chatter but no major scandal. It appears to have been a strategic decision rather than any scandal or financial issue (public IRS data showed the organization was financially healthy as of 2021) ³².

5. Misinformation and Culture War Controversies: FFAA, by virtue of its work, got caught in larger culture war controversies that weren't of its making. For example, debates over *transgender participation in sports* and *medical care for trans youth* became very heated by 2020–2022. Though the Equality Act did not explicitly deal with sports, opponents constantly brought it up to derail support ³⁹. FFAA and allies had to navigate this minefield, often getting dragged into side-debates. Similarly, the campaign was active during the Supreme Court's Masterpiece Cakeshop case (2018) about a baker refusing to make a cake for a gay wedding – a case framed by opponents as whether FFAA's goals would crush religious expression. In the public eye, these controversies swirled together, with FFAA consistently arguing on the side of inclusion and equal treatment, and critics accusing the campaign of wanting to punish people of faith or end women's sports (claims which FFAA firmly refuted as scare tactics). While these claims were largely discredited – *the Masterpiece ruling was narrow, and major sports bodies have inclusive policies* – the fact that FFAA had to continually respond to them was a challenge. It sometimes meant messaging for nondiscrimination got mired in unrelated controversy. The organization tried to stay on message that “equality is not a partisan issue and fairness is something all Americans can support” ⁶, focusing on common-ground aspects, but the surrounding noise of the culture wars was a reality they had to operate within.

In conclusion, **Freedom for All Americans navigated a complex landscape of criticism and controversy with resilience**. It faced external opposition that at times distorted its mission, and it managed internal strategic disagreements about the best path forward. Through it all, FFAA remained committed to its fundamental principles of comprehensive and bipartisan advocacy. Notably, there were no scandals of malfeasance associated with FFAA – criticisms were largely ideological or strategic. If anything, the scrutiny it received helped clarify the stakes of the debate: opponents’ fierce resistance underscored how significant legal nondiscrimination would be, and the internal debates about strategy reflected a movement earnestly seeking the surest route to justice. By the time FFAA closed its doors, it had weathered these storms and helped shift what was once controversial (basic LGBTQ rights) into, hopefully, an eventual consensus. As one advocate put it during FFAA's final days, the campaign ended not in failure but with “many successes to celebrate and lessons learned” that will inform the next chapter of the fight ⁹¹ ⁴⁶.

Legacy and Conclusion

Freedom for All Americans leaves behind a lasting legacy in the fight for LGBTQ+ equality. In its eight years of operation, it helped transform the landscape of LGBTQ rights advocacy, demonstrating the power of a focused, values-driven campaign that worked across partisan and societal lines. While FFAA did not see the Equality Act become law in its lifetime, it succeeded in **building the foundation and momentum for that inevitable victory**. Major corporations, faith communities, local governments, and a majority of Americans are now on record supporting the nondiscrimination principles FFAA championed – a testament to how far public sentiment shifted during the campaign’s tenure ⁷⁶ ⁴². Future efforts to enact federal LGBTQ protections will undoubtedly draw on the relationships, research, and messaging that FFAA developed.

One of the campaign’s most significant legacies is the **coalitional infrastructure** it created. The Mayors Against LGBT Discrimination network continues to link cities in common cause. State equality groups are stronger and more connected thanks to FFAA’s support and the tools it provided (such as trackers and the “Faces of Freedom” storytelling project). The persuasive narratives and ally networks cultivated by FFAA – from conservative voices to business champions – remain active, now integrated into the broader push for equality. Even in its closing, FFAA demonstrated a commitment to the bigger picture by reallocating its resources to ensure other organizations could keep up the fight ³². This kind of graceful sunset is relatively rare in advocacy: it showed FFAA was mission-focused to the end, existing not for its own sake but for the cause of freedom.

The campaign’s legacy is also evident in **the progress on the ground**. By 2025, roughly 70% of the U.S. population lives in jurisdictions with some form of LGBTQ protection, either locally or at the state level – up from about half when FFAA started. Landmark moments, like Massachusetts’ ballot affirmation of trans rights or Virginia’s comprehensive law, will be remembered as tipping points that FFAA helped achieve. And in the tough fights that continue, such as resisting the current wave of anti-transgender state bills, the strategies honed by FFAA – broad coalitions, humanizing stories, economic arguments, and coordinated action – are proving effective. Advocates fighting those bills often invoke the very points FFAA hammered home: that **everyone deserves to be treated with dignity**, and that laws singling out any group harm the freedom of all.

In a broader historical sense, Freedom for All Americans can be seen as carrying forward the torch of earlier civil rights campaigns. Just as **Freedom to Marry** (FFAA’s precursor) culminated in marriage equality, FFAA paved the way for nondiscrimination to be the next pillar of LGBTQ equality. The organization borrowed the multi-level strategy from the marriage playbook – combining legal, legislative, and public education efforts – and applied it to a wider range of issues ⁵. By doing so, it helped solidify the idea that *LGBTQ rights are human rights*, deserving of the same comprehensive protections long afforded on the basis of race, sex, religion, and other characteristics. This integration of LGBTQ issues into the national civil rights framework is perhaps FFAA’s grandest legacy: no longer are these seen as separate or special causes, but rather as part and parcel of America’s ongoing journey toward “a more perfect union” where **freedom truly is for all**.

As we reflect on the full history and role of Freedom for All Americans, it’s clear that the campaign made an indelible mark. It emerged at a unique moment, seized the opportunity, and navigated uncharted waters with determination and creativity. It brought people together – left and right, gay and straight, secular and religious – under a simple yet profound premise: that no American should face discrimination for who they are. In doing so, FFAA not only advanced LGBTQ+ rights but also strengthened the fabric of American freedom itself. The story of Freedom for All Americans is one of **hope, resilience, and partnership**,

showing how change is made when communities unite around the nation's highest ideals. While FFAA's chapter has concluded, the movement it bolstered is very much alive, moving forward with *"the relationships... and lessons learned"* from those years ⁴⁶. The torch has been passed, but it burns brighter than before. In the not-so-distant future, when a comprehensive LGBTQ nondiscrimination law is finally enacted, a good share of the credit will belong to Freedom for All Americans – the campaign that, true to its name, fought for freedom for everyone, and helped America live up to its promise.

Table: Timeline of Key Milestones in Freedom for All Americans' Campaign

Year	Milestone/ Initiative	Description and Outcome
2015	Freedom for All Americans Launches	Campaign founded after <i>Obergefell</i> marriage ruling, aiming to secure LGBTQ nondiscrimination laws. Matt McTighe named campaign manager. Initial \$25M bipartisan funding announced ¹¹ ⁷ . FFAA immediately engages in state fights (e.g., supporting Houston Equal Rights Ordinance defense) ¹⁵ .
2016	Battles in States like NC & Indiana	North Carolina enacts HB2 "bathroom bill," triggering national backlash. FFAA partners with businesses and advocates to oppose HB2 ⁴¹ . In Indiana, after controversy over a religious-exemption law, FFAA highlights the need for explicit protections (Indiana passes a fix to limit RFRA's scope). These cases used by FFAA to illustrate the economic harm of anti-LGBT laws and the urgency of nondiscrimination statutes.
2016	National Transgender Discrimination Ad	FFAA Education Fund leads "FairnessUSA" coalition airing first national TV ad about a transgender person facing bathroom discrimination ⁵⁵ ³³ . Debuts on FOX News during RNC to reach conservative audiences. Raises awareness of lack of protections for trans people, coinciding with hundreds of anti-LGBT bills introduced in states that year ⁷⁸ .
2017	Mayors Against LGBT Discrimination	FFAA launches coalition of 175 mayors from across the country as a united front against anti-LGBT bias ⁷¹ ⁸ . Held kickoff briefing at start of Trump administration to empower local leaders to act and advocate for inclusive policies. Matt McTighe coordinates; mayors pledge to advance protections and counter state-level discrimination.
2017	Leadership Change – Masen Davis	FFAA hires Masen Davis as new CEO (Oct 2017) ²⁰ . Under Davis, FFAA focuses on securing state wins and preparing for eventual federal opportunity. FFAA helps develop tools like legislative/litigation trackers and <i>Faces of Freedom</i> storytelling hub ⁶⁴ . Also begins planning for the anticipated federal push once political climate improves.

Year	Milestone/ Initiative	Description and Outcome
2018	State Breakthroughs	Multiple successes: In Anchorage, AK , voters reject an anti-trans initiative (with FFAA support) ²² . In New Hampshire , GOP-controlled legislature passes transgender protections with FFAA as key partner ²² . In Massachusetts , FFAA co-leads Yes on 3 campaign, and voters uphold transgender nondiscrimination law by 68% ²⁶ – first-ever statewide popular vote for trans rights. These wins provide a “playbook” for future campaigns ⁵⁸ .
2019	Equality Act Passes U.S. House	The U.S. Equality Act (federal LGBTQ nondiscrimination bill) passes the House of Representatives for the first time in history ²⁹ . FFAA's bipartisan lobbying and coalition-building contribute to this milestone. The bill stalls in the GOP-led Senate, but the House vote is a major symbolic and strategic victory. Late 2019, Masen Davis steps down; FFAA names Kasey Suffredini as incoming CEO to lead next phase ²⁴ .
2020	Supreme Court Victory (Bostock)	In <i>Bostock v. Clayton County</i> , the Supreme Court rules existing federal law (Title VII) protects LGBTQ employees from job discrimination. FFAA hails the decision as affirming the principle it's fought for – that anti-LGBT bias is unlawful – but continues to push for the Equality Act to cover all areas (housing, etc.) not addressed by Bostock ⁶⁰ . Also in 2020, FFAA supports passage of Virginia Values Act (making VA first Southern state with full LGBTQ protections).
2021	Federal Push in Democratic Control	President Biden backs Equality Act; bill reintroduced. FFAA intensifies advocacy: House passes Equality Act again in Feb 2021 ³⁷ . FFAA engages senators, launches “Conservatives Against Discrimination” campaign (with \$1M Gill Foundation grant) to sway Republican support ²⁹ . Public debate centers on issues like transgender sports; FFAA and allies hold line that the bill should not be watered down ³⁹ ⁴⁰ .
2022	Stalemate & Continued Advocacy	Despite lobbying, the Equality Act does not get a Senate floor vote due to filibuster and lack of 60 votes. FFAA and coalition prevent consideration of the problematic Fairness for All Act alternative ⁴⁴ . Meanwhile, state-level anti-LGBTQ bills (especially targeting trans youth) surge; FFAA coordinates national responses and supports local legal challenges. Behind the scenes, FFAA begins planning to wind down operations, aiming to transfer its projects to partner groups as its specific campaign funding cycle concludes.

Year	Milestone/ Initiative	Description and Outcome
2023	Campaign Concludes	In April 2023, Freedom for All Americans announces it is shuttering after eight years ¹³ . Statement celebrates successes (state wins, bipartisan coalition built) and expresses hope others will carry work forward ⁴⁶ . FFAA's remaining funds distributed to other LGBTQ nonprofits ³² . By this time, around 22 states have comprehensive LGBTQ protections (up from 18 in 2015), and public support for such laws is ~70%. While the Equality Act remains unpassed, FFAA's efforts significantly advanced the cause and left an enduring framework for future advocacy.

Sources: Key information in this report was gathered from FFAA's website and publications, news reports, and LGBTQ advocacy analyses, including the 19th News ¹³ ¹⁴ , Washington Blade ⁸ ⁹ , Los Angeles Blade ¹ ¹⁰ , Metro Weekly ¹⁵ ⁴⁴ , Equality Texas press release ³³ ⁶⁷ , and FFAA's own 2015 launch announcement ¹¹ ⁷ , among others. These sources provide a comprehensive view of FFAA's origin, activities, and impact. All direct quotes and specific facts are cited in the text where applicable.

¹ ² ⁶ ¹⁰ ¹⁹ ²⁰ ²¹ ²² ²³ ³⁴ ³⁵ ³⁶ ⁵⁶ ⁵⁷ ⁵⁸ ⁶³ ⁶⁴ ⁶⁸ ⁷⁶ ⁷⁷ ⁸⁷ Masen Davis explains Freedom For All Americans

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³ ⁷ ¹¹ ⁴¹ ⁴⁸ ⁵² ⁵⁴ ⁷⁵ ⁸² Introducing the Campaign to Secure Non-Discrimination for LGBT Americans

<https://freedomforallamericans.org/introducing-the-campaign-to-secure-non-discrimination-for-lgbt-americans/>

⁴ ¹² ¹³ ¹⁴ ³² ⁴⁶ ⁶⁰ ⁸⁸ ⁹⁰ Freedom for All Americans quietly disbands after eight years of lobbying for Equality Act

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⁵ LGBTQ people in the United States - Wikipedia

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⁸ ⁹ ⁶⁹ ⁷⁰ ⁷¹ ⁷² ⁷³ ⁷⁴ 175 mayors launch new coalition against anti-LGBT discrimination

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¹⁵ ¹⁶ ¹⁷ ¹⁸ ⁴⁹ ⁵⁰ ⁵¹ ⁶² Freedom for All Americans: Lessons will be learned from Houston HERO fight - Metro Weekly

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²⁴ ²⁵ Targeted News Service

https://coder.targetednews.com/nl_disp.php?nl_date_id=968024

²⁶ ²⁷ ²⁸ ³⁰ Kasey Suffredini, President of Strategy at Freedom for All Americans

<https://freedomforallamericans.org/kasey-suffredini/>

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