

We Are All Oppressed Until The Last Of Us Is Free

As we write these words, we sit with the sobering fact that our world continues to suffer.

The impacts of COVID-19 have caused instability across our communities, and many small businesses that are pivotal to our local economy have been decimated. According to April 2022 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Business Pulse Survey, more than 64% of small business owners in Massachusetts reported a large or moderate negative effect on their business from the pandemic.

The lives of our children have been upended too. A study from the University of Massachusetts Boston showed that 75% of respondents with children in grades ranging from pre-school to middle school reported that their children were suffering academically because of the pandemic.

And most recently, multiple senseless and horrific mass shootings, increasing violence and hate crimes, and the invasion of sovereign nations and civil wars, have us angry and wanting action. The lack of resolve in our leaders, has us all down to pulling up the proverbial covers over our collective heads.

Dismantling the Myth that Justice is a Zero-Sum Game

As we experience the whiplash that comes with increasingly shorter news cycles, it can be easy to lose sight of the myriad battles being waged in the name of justice and, as we celebrate Pride Month, we note this is particularly true when it comes to LGBTQ+ rights.

While we acknowledge the hard-won progress in Massachusetts and beyond over many decades with and for the LGBTQ+ community, we have not moved beyond bias and hate, leaving many vulnerable members of this community to be assaulted and murdered simply for being who they are. Many still face considerable institutional barriers and systematic discrimination. During this Pride season, we should remember this founding tenet of the Gay Liberation Movement: "We are all oppressed until the least of us is free."

There's a complacency that comes with an either/or understanding of the world—one that says we must pick and choose which issues to care about and which to put aside. And that's the tricky thing about injustice: it wants you to focus on one hand while the other hand works deviously to undermine progress.

But justice isn't either/or. It can't be stratified, and there is no arbiter deciding which issues are more important than others. The *true* nature of social justice demands that we dismantle the false dichotomy which elevates some causes over others. We cannot entertain any argument that justice in one area is somehow more sacred than in another. The either/or paradigm only puts us in a faulty zero-sum game: If I win, you lose.

Equity for One Is Not Equity at All

The experience of equity isn't the same for any two populations or two people. We all need different forms of support and resources to live a life expressing our full potential. The possible dismantling of *Roe v. Wade*, for example, is an issue that reverberates across many communities and everyone who lives at the intersections of those identities. Low-income women (many of whom



Celebrating Pride Month at Boston Pop-Up Pride, a grassroots, community-organized event celebrating LGBTQ+ identities and inclusivity for all. Photo Credit: Marilyn Humphries

live at or below 200% of the federal poverty level) and women of color are inordinately impacted by changes in the provision of reproductive health services. Sadly, the precedent set by overturning the ruling would undoubtedly impact other Supreme Court rulings, and the ripple effects will touch us all.

Fifty-three years after the seminal events of the Stonewall Riots, it is true now more than ever that equity is not—and can *never* be—fully realized unless each and every one of us is experiencing it in every facet of our identities. LGBTQ+ rights are just as important as the right to choose, the right to live without experiencing racial discrimination, the right to safety, and the right to participate fully in our democracy.

Businesses, both large and small, have more than a moral obligation to invest resources into the local communities they serve. Their efforts to find and retain talent are directly impacted by the inequities experienced by marginalized populations. Right now, for example, LGBTQ+ people in Massachusetts are fighting an uphill battle to have their parenting rights recognized and treated the same as those of cisgender, heterosexual parents. The Massachusetts Parentage Act (MPA) would provide a common sense approach to defining parentage for children born through surrogacy or assisted reproduction, or to unmarried same-sex parents. It's an important bill that will update Massachusetts state law to more closely accommodate the social realities of the 21st Century.

Our Collective Moral Imperative

Each of us has a moral imperative not to view justice solely through the lens of our own identities, and we have the data to prove that New England can continue to be a leader when it comes to the issues that matter. Massachusetts is a national leader in civil rights accomplishments, from the right to marry to the right to access quality healthcare and reproductive services, and New Hampshire ranks first in the nation in economic opportunity and second in equality measures, according to U.S. News & World Report. Those of us who walk with privilege and are not adversely impacted by the color of our skin or who we love, have a responsibility to be allies to our brothers

and sisters who carry the burden of prejudice and homophobia every day.

As we pursue justice for all, we need to continue to come together, working across the complexity of our differences and similarities by listening to and caring for one another. It's when we come together, demanding the systemic change that liberates us all, that we walk in the power that only solidarity through compassion can provide.

This Pride Month, despite seeing so much bigotry and hate in the world, we have the power to serve as a moral counterweight—to collectively show the world that none of us experiences true justice if all of us aren't experiencing it.

Created in 1994, the Eastern Bank Foundation is the philanthropic arm of Boston-based Eastern Bank. Through philanthropy, employee volunteerism, advocacy, and collaborations with other businesses and community partners, Eastern Bank Foundation responds to community needs and supports sustainable solutions to our society's most vexing challenges.



Nancy Huntington Stager is President and CEO of the Eastern Bank Foundation and Treasurer of the MA LGBT Chamber and a Director of the LGBT Business Network. A champion of civil rights, economic justice and inclusion, she is dedicated to driving good at Eastern and in our communities. Stager has actively shaped Eastern Bank as a leader in corporate citizenship in the region.



Grace Moreno is Executive Director of the Massachusetts LGBT Chamber of Commerce and LGBT Business Network. An experienced senior executive, start-up nurturer, and mission-driven entrepreneur, Grace has led in the issues of universal health care access in MA, fair housing, civic engagement and LGBTQ+ inclusion. She is a firm believer that there is no justice until there is economic justice.