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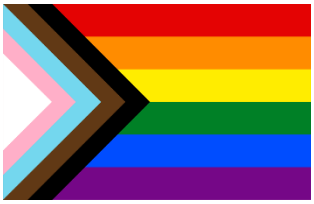
Pride in Practice: Celebrating LGBTQ+ Inclusion in the Legal Profession



Pride Month presents us with an opportunity to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community, honor the progress made toward equality and equity, and recommit to the work of inclusion. For the legal profession, Pride Month provides a reminder that respect, dignity, and access to justice are not abstract ideals, but that they are part of how we serve our clients, support our colleagues, and strengthen public trust in the law.

The Origins of Pride

In the United States, the modern Pride movement traces much of its history back to the summer of 1969. Historically, and now, LGBTQ+ people in the United States often faced open criminalization, public hostility, employment consequences, and routine police harassment. By 1969, bars and other gathering places were among the few spaces where LGBTQ+ people could find community. One of the most famous was the Stonewall Inn in Manhattan's Greenwich Village, which served a diverse LGBTQ+ clientele, including gay men, lesbians, transgender people, drag queens, gender-nonconforming people, and others who were often pushed to the margins of public life.[1] Until 1966, New York had treated the service of alcohol to gay people as grounds for enforcement action against bars and restaurants.[2] Although the formal ban on serving gay patrons had been lifted by 1969, the stigma and policing practices surrounding LGBTQ+ gathering spaces remained, and homosexuality was still considered a criminal offense. Consequently, those safe spaces were also frequent targets of sanctioned harassment and raids, and the Stonewall Inn was no exception.[3]

In the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, members of the New York City Police Department raided the Stonewall.[4] Typically, raids of this kind resulted in arrests, intimidation, and the closure of the space for the night. This time, however, patrons and neighborhood residents did not disperse quietly. Instead, they resisted after years of targeted mistreatment, harassment,

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[1] Library of Congress, "1969: The Stonewall Uprising,", *LGBTQIA+ Studies: A Resource Guide* (June 13, 2020), https://guides.loc.gov/lgbtq-studies/stonewall-era.
[2] *Id.*
[3] *Id.*
[4] *Id.*

and violence. This confrontation grew into several days of protest and unrest, now remembered as the Stonewall Uprising.

Transgender and gender-nonconforming people, drag performers, lesbians, and queer people of color were among those especially vulnerable to police harassment. Laws governing disorderly conduct, "masquerade," and public morality were often used to target gender expression. In practice, officers relied on an informal "three-article" rule under which people could be arrested or harassed if they were not wearing enough clothing associated with their assigned sex.[5] Members of these especially vulnerable groups were also among those who resisted at Stonewall. Figures such as Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera later became among the most visible symbols of that resistance and helped shape the gay liberation movement that followed.[6]

Stonewall was not the first time LGBTQ+ people advocated for their rights or stood against mistreatment. Before Stonewall, many individuals and organizations had already laid important groundwork through advocacy, organizing, public education, and resistance. What Stonewall became, however, was a turning point that remained in the national consciousness. It helped energize a broader movement for visibility, dignity, and equal treatment under the law.[7]

How Stonewall Led to Pride

One year after the Stonewall Uprising, New York City saw its first Pride march, then known as Christopher Street Liberation Day.[8] Over time, the language of liberation and Pride became closely linked, and those annual commemorations expanded into the Pride Month observances recognized today. Louisiana has its own place in that history. In 1978, New Orleans' Pink Triangle Alliance hosted the state's first Gay Pride rally, connecting Louisiana to the national Pride tradition that grew from Stonewall and the broader LGBTQ+ rights movement.[9] In 1999, a presidential proclamation recognized June as Gay and Lesbian Pride Month, expressly citing the Stonewall

[5] Hugh Ryan, "How Dressing in Drag Was Labeled a Crime in the 20th Century," *History.com*, https://www.history.com/articles/stonewall-riots-lgbtq-drag-three-article-rule, accessed June 15, 2026.
[6] *Stonewall Uprising: The Year that Changed America*, PBS, *The LGBTQ+ Experience*, June 10, 2023, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/stonewall/.
[7] Library of Congress, "1969: The Stonewall Uprising," June 13, 2020, *LGBTQIA+ Studies: A Resource Guide*, https://guides.loc.gov/lgbtq-studies/stonewall-era.
[8] The Library of Congress, "Gay and Proud," *Library of Congress Online Catalog*, https://www.loc.gov/item/2024603228, accessed June 15, 2026.
[9] Robert W. Fieseler, "LGBTQ+ Rights Movement in Louisiana", *64 Parishes*, Apr. 9, 2021, Mar. 24, 2023 (last updated), https://64parishes.org/entry/lgbtq-rights-movement-in-louisiana.

Uprising.[10] More acts recognizing the Stonewall Uprising the legitimatizing the LGBTQ+ movement followed.[11]

From Pride History to Legal Practice

The Pride movement grew from decades of organizing for dignity, safety, visibility, and equal treatment. For lawyers, that history has particular significance because it helped make LGBTQ+ people more visible within the profession, expanded pathways for LGBTQ+ lawyers and law students, encouraged law firms to examine workplace policies and client service, and contributed to legal developments that now shape employment, family and estate planning, public accommodations, criminal, and civil rights practice.

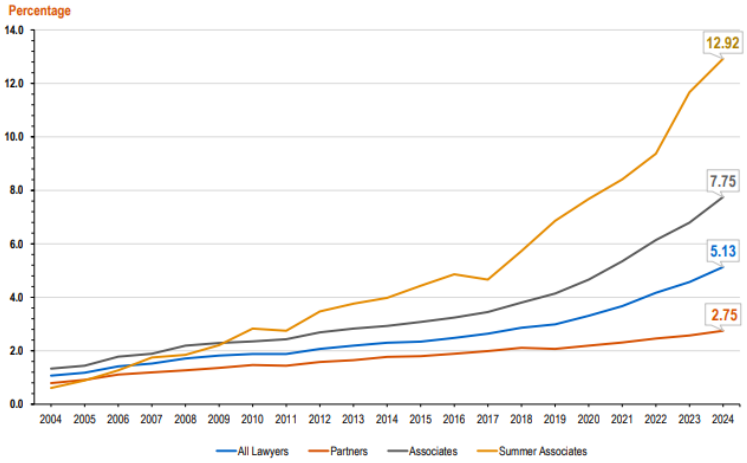
Pride in legal practice means more than celebration alone. It means building a profession where LGBTQ+ clients, attorneys, staff, and community members can participate fully and openly. It means recognizing that the ability to live and work authentically is not separate from professional excellence, client service, or access to justice. When people are forced to hide essential parts of themselves, the profession loses talent, perspective, advocacy, and trust.

One measurable sign of progress can be seen within the legal profession itself. According to the National Association for Law Placement's 2024 Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms, 5.13% of lawyers in reporting U.S. law firms identified as LGBTQ+. This was the first time that figure exceeded 5%.[12] The same report found higher representation among younger lawyers. In report U.S. law firms, 7.75% of associates and 12.92% of summer associates identified as LGBTQ+, compared with 2.75% of partners. The summer associate figure more than doubled between 2018 and 2024.[13]

Percentage of LGBTA Lawyers, 2004-2024

[10] "Proclamation 7203 – Gay and Lesbian Pride Month, 1999," *The American Presidency Project*, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-7203-gay-and-lesbian-pride-month-1999, accessed June 15, 2026.
[11] *See also* "First National Monument to Honor Story of LGBT Americans", *U.S. Dep't of the Interior*, https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/secretary-jewell-applauds-president-obamas-designation-stonewall-national-monument, accessed June 16, 2026.
[12] National Association for Law Placement, "2024 Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms", Jan. 2025, *NALP*, https://www.nalp.org/uploads/Research/2024-25_NALPReportonDiversity.pdf.
[13] *Id.*

Those numbers matter because they show a profession becoming more open, more transparent, and more willing to recognize LGBTQ+ identity as part of the diversity of the legal workplace. Younger lawyers are entering the profession with greater openness than prior generations. They also remind us that visibility matters. When LGBTQ+ lawyers and law students can see a place for themselves in the profession, they are better able to enter, remain, lead, and serve. In turn, this will lead to the communities being better served.



Why Representation and Inclusion Matter In Legal Practice

The presence of openly LGBTQ+ lawyers benefits the profession. It expands the range of lived experience within legal workplaces, helping firms better understand the needs of LGBTQ+ clients and communities so that they can seek legal advice without fear of judgment or humiliation. LGBTQ+ clients often come to the legal system with needs that require both technical skill and cultural understanding. Their legal issues may involve employment discrimination, harassment, retaliation, family law, adoption, custody, estate planning, health care decision making, housing, public accommodations, name changes, identity documents, the protection of chosen-family relationships, victim advocacy, or criminal defense. For clients who have already experienced misunderstanding, dismissal, or dehumanization, the lawyer's office and the courtroom must not become another place where they feel unseen and mistreated. If the legal system feels inaccessible or hostile, then people are less likely to seek the protection and remedies the law is supposed to provide.

Inclusive practice does not require every lawyer to have the same lived experience as every client, but it does require that lawyers listen carefully, avoid assumptions, respect confidentiality, and understand how the law affects people whose lives and families may not fit expectations. In that sense, Pride in practice is part of competent and professional representation.

The practical impact of these developments continues today. Employment law offers one example. In *Bostock v. Clayton County*, the United States Supreme Court held that federal employment law protects workers from discrimination because they are gay or transgender. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits workplace discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The Court explained that when an employer intentionally fires an individual employee based, at least in part, on sex, the employer violates Title VII. The Court further reasoned that discrimination based on homosexuality or transgender status necessarily requires an employer to treat an employee differently because of sex.[14] Since *Bostick*, the EEOC

[14] *Bostock v. Clayton County*, 590 U.S. 644 (2020).

has reported recovering approximately $13.5 million in monetary benefits to resolve charges alleging discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in the 2023 fiscal year.[15] Legal developments like *Bostock* did not occur in isolation. They were shaped by decades of advocacy, visibility, scholarship, litigation, and public understanding about how discrimination against LGBTQ+ people operates in real life.

Pride in Practice

For the legal profession, Pride Month is not only a commemoration of history. It is an invitation to consider how the values behind Pride appear in our day-to-day work, such as creating intake forms that do not assume a client's gender, spouse, family structure, or legal needs. It can mean using respectful language with clients and colleagues and ensuring that workplace policies protect against discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. It can also mean recognizing that a client's chosen family may be central to estate planning, medical decision-making, or emergency preparedness. Firms can support mentorship, recruitment, and retention efforts so that LGBTQ+ lawyers and staff can thrive.

These steps are not merely symbolic. They improve communication, build trust, reduce barriers to representation, and strengthen the profession's commitment to equal justice. They also remind us that inclusion is not separate from professionalism, but is how it is practiced.

A Personal Reflection

I am someone who has personally benefited from the Pride movement to where I feel safe enough to identify openly as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Without feeling safe and proud, I would not have been able to become the lawyer and advocate I am today.

Pride reminds us that every person should be able to take pride in the positive aspects of themselves. I am grateful that I can take pride in being an openly gay man. I am also grateful to be part of a profession that has the power to protect dignity, expand access to justice, and help ensure that others are treated with respect and humanity.

As we reflect on this past Pride Month, we need to celebrate the progress that has been made, honor those who made that progress possible, and recommit ourselves to the work that remains. Pride in practice means carrying the values of dignity, visibility, inclusion, and equal treatment into the way we serve our clients, support our colleagues, and strengthen the legal profession for everyone.

[15] U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "A Message from EEOC Chair Charlotte A. Burrows for 2024 Pride Month", *EEOC What You Should Know*, https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/message-eeoc-chair-charlotte-burrows-2024-pride-month, accessed June 16, 2026.