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MN Rep. Leigh Finke (66A) Launches Queer Leadership Organization



St. Paul, MN – [Minnesota House Rep. Leigh Finke](#) unveils plans to fight back against the staggering rise of anti-transgender and anti-LGBTQIA2S+ legislation by extremist Republicans with the launch of “[Queer Equity Institute](#).” A leadership organization founded to equip LGBTQ2S+ people with *everything* they need to be civic, political, and community leaders in Minnesota and beyond.

“When they go low, we go high,” said Rep. Finke. “The organization’s primary function will be to provide fellowships, paired with programming and community-based resources. QEI Fellows will foster a dynamic network of queer-helmed businesses and organizations; produce the next visionary politicians, activists, and advocates; and uplift the genius and creativity of our artists and media producers.”

Leigh Finke made history in November 2022, when she won her seat in the Minnesota House of Representatives and became the first transgender person elected to the state legislature. Just

before the start of her first session at the capitol, she made history again when she was named the Chair of the first-ever Queer Caucus.

On March 19th, Leigh was named Minnesota Woman of the Year by USA Today, another groundbreaking moment in her journey. And, just last week, the bill she authored, known as the Trans Refuge Bill, passed through the House of Representatives.

Since her election last year, Leigh has become a recognized leader for the queer community in Minnesota, and across the nation. Local and national media outlets have featured her efforts. But to understand the underlying value of Leigh's voice, the power of her journey to resonate beyond the [borders of Minnesota](#) to virtually [every corner of the United States](#)—one need only review the facts of our nation's changing demographics.

7.1% of Americans today identify as LGBT. That's 20.8% of Gen Z and 10.5% of Millennials as compared to 4.2% of Gen X and 2.6% of Baby Boomers, according to [Gallup](#). Whereas, [HRC](#) recently reported, "LGBTQ+ voters are [not only] becoming one of the fastest-growing voting blocs in the country [but are] projected to represent nearly one-fifth of voters by 2040 and fundamentally reshape the American Electoral landscape."

Despite the growing visibility of the queer community in this country, LGBTQ2S+ people remain dramatically under-represented across all civic and professional levels with the number of barriers to participation increasing. This fact is most starkly reflected in public office. While LGBTQ2S+ people comprise about 8% of the US population, we hold only 0.2% of elected offices nationally.

"In this nation, there are multilayered, complicated barriers built into our systems designed to decrease participation from queer people and people of color in social, civic, and political environments. Their exclusion and segregation have been detrimental to all of our communities, and to the true aim of democracy: an inclusive, equitable society for all. THAT is what drives the work of the Queer Equity Institute," said Finke.

Rep. Leigh Finke has been jointly elected Board President and Executive Director of Queer Equity Institute, by a formidable Board of Directors representative of an equally impressive collection of "queer firsts:" Board Chair Ravyn Gibbs is the first queer, Ojibwe woman to commence a Native American Outreach Director position for a Minnesota congressional office; while Jason Bucklin, Board Treasurer, is the first LGBTQ Specialist at the Minnesota Department of Education; and Board Secretary Dionne Sims is the first openly queer Black bookstore owner in the history of Minnesota.

Together, the Queer Equity Institute Board asserts: "We believe everybody has a right to be a part of our civic, social, and political landscape. And we believe a whole lot of queer people really WANT TO BE LEADERS in those arenas. By empowering queer leaders with the resources to directly impact public life, we can break down all the barriers that have been built to keep our communities out of power." ###