

Virginia Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce

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PRESS RELEASE

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November 17, 2014 – Today



Governor McAuliffe announced the formation of a statewide [LGBT Tourism Task Force](#). As Virginians, said McAuliffe, “[w]e’re unified by one common goal: to make Virginia a better place to live, work, play, and raise a family. *We have an opportunity to build upon the progress Virginia made this year in achieving marriage equality and ensure that visitors across the globe know that the Commonwealth is open and welcoming to all.* Not only will this task force focus on showcasing Virginia as an LGBT friendly destination, it will also work to maximize tourism growth in Virginia with all communities, nationally and internationally.”

The task force, led by Secretary of Commerce and Trade, Maurice Jones, will be comprised of industry stakeholders, LGBT community members and business leaders from across Virginia. The group will make recommendations on how to make Virginia even more welcoming to the LGBT community. LGBT travelers spend upwards of \$100 billion every year on travel in the United States. According to Forrester Research Inc., LGBT people travel more and have the largest disposable income of any niche market group, and they stay longer than straight travelers. Virginia will have to work hard to make up for lost time, as dozens of other states and cities have been actively marketing to LGBT travelers for many years. Acknowledging the challenge ahead, McAuliffe noted, “We have obviously lost business to other states . . . but we are all-in now. You can no longer say that Virginia is not open [to LGBT travelers].”

The Governor announced the creation of the LGBT Task Force at VA-1, the Commonwealth’s annual summit that focuses on ways to maximize Virginia’s tourism potential. Virginia tourism is a \$21.5 billion industry employing 213,000 Virginians statewide. This year’s VA-1 summit, held at the Hyatt Regency in Reston, welcomed more than 400 people from all sectors of Virginia’s tourism industry. This summit aimed to help businesses and economic regions identify new and game changing ways to stay competitive, leverage new opportunities through relationship building and engage the LGBT community. Giving a nod to the Governor’s new LGBT Task Force, the summit featured a special breakout session dedicated to LGBT tourism marketing in which Katherine O’Donnell, Vice President of Community Relations at Richmond Region Tourism, and others spoke about the enormous economic potential that the LGBT demographic has to offer.

“I’m very supportive of the Governor’s recognition of this important demographic,” said summit attendee [Justin Ayars, JD](#), President and CEO of the recently formed Virginia Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (“VGLCC”). As a member of Richmond’s LGBT Tourism Task Force, Ayars worked with Richmond tourism officials on its LGBT marketing campaign, [OutRVA](#). A small business owner and longtime chamber of commerce leader, Ayars has “seen firsthand the economic benefits of LGBT tourism,” and “look[s] forward to seeing this effort spread from Richmond to the entire Commonwealth.”



By announcing the creation of the LGBT Tourism Task Force, Governor McAuliffe formally recognized what the business community has known for years: *Rather than a mere social movement, the LGBT community is a rich demographic that contains rapidly expanding business and consumer markets with significant financial resources.* The VGLCC identifies, empowers and makes the oft-elusive LGBT community accessible to its members through collaborative efforts, education and the language of economics. To remain competitive, it is imperative that businesses and economic regions engage this increasingly visible and lucrative demographic. Governor McAuliffe’s savvy decision to embrace the LGBT community sets the stage for Virginia to prosper and thrive in the diverse marketplace of the 21st century.