



Department of

English

Henry Sias

BA '98

Executive Director, Pennsylvania
Governor's Advisory Commission on
LGBTQ Affairs

Henry Sias earned his bachelor's degree in English from Western Michigan University in 1998. Born and raised in Detroit, he came to Kalamazoo to study creative writing, with the goal of becoming a novelist, but instead went on to Yale Law School and received his law degree in 2005. Sias now lives in Philadelphia, where he has become a criminal defense and civil rights lawyer, a community advocate, and the city's first transgender candidate for elected office. Sias is currently Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Governor's Advisory Commission on LGBTQ Affairs. Philadelphia Magazine has called him "a trailblazing public figure."

While still a law student, Sias began working on pro bono projects for the LGBT+ community. He also contributed to an amicus brief for a landmark case in which the Supreme Court struck down all laws criminalizing same-sex relations in the United States. After he graduated from law school, Sias clerked for two Justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and went on to co-found Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity, a legal nonprofit that has helped to clear the criminal records of thousands of low-income Philadelphians. For over a decade, Sias was also involved in efforts to reform Philadelphia's indigent defense program.

As a civil rights lawyer, Sias has worked to promote marriage equality, fight discrimination and help keep immigrants to the United States from being deported. In his pro bono work, he has represented several transgender individuals with name changes and cases involving medical care and coverage. As an appointee to Pennsylvania's Commission on LGBTQ Affairs, Sias has drafted inclusive language for an executive order on sexual harassment policies for state employees. Sias was additionally a candidate for judge of Philadelphia's Court of Common Pleas in 2017 and 2019.