

- I am so happy to be here with you today. It is fantastic to see so many people ready to march and celebrate the LGBTI community.
- As the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People, I am working day in and day out to advance equality and human rights across Scotland.
- But I simply couldn't do that without the amazing work of activists such as yourself who in many cases have been fighting for equality and human rights for years and decades.
- As many of you will be aware, this year marks the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall uprisings in New York in 1969, which was a pivotal moment of the modern Pride movement.

- Less than 40 years ago same sex sexual activity was illegal - full stop. Gay men and women faced widespread discrimination, fearful prejudice and hostility. Many understandably felt that they were not safe to be themselves, and retreated into the closet or never came out in the first place. Scotland's hypermasculine culture in the 70s and 80s made it enormously challenging if you failed to conform to rigid gender stereotypes
- But through relentless activism, attitudes began to change and rightly we have made tremendous strides. Given the climate, I cannot help but be in awe of the sheer bravery of these activists who often stood in small numbers in their drive to change the world. I hope they look back today and are proud of what they accomplished. A shift over years in the attitudes of the public, and now widespread acceptance of lesbian and gay people as having the same rights as everyone else.
- Today's event is a prime example of how we are putting this into practice and creates a unique event for all ages to connect with and celebrate Scotland's LGBTI culture in this great City.

- As a Government, we are rightly proud of achievements thus far in advancing LGBTI equality.
- However, we recognise that there is much more to be done and are committed more than ever to driving that forward. And I want to use the rest of my time to touch upon Gender Recognition.
- Let me be clear. We want a Bill – but more importantly, we want a law.
- A Gender Recognition Act that removes unnecessary barriers for trans people to live in their true gender. An Act that is passed with strong support from across the chamber and wider society.
- So we want to press ahead – but we also want to achieve consensus.
- This Government remains committed to reforming the system of gender recognition to ensure that it is line with international best practice. We are committed to introducing a bill during the current parliamentary session. I want to make that point crystal clear.

- It is clear that transphobia remains a serious issue in Scotland. If we are truly to live up to our reputation as one of Europe's most progressive countries for LGBTI people, then we need to tackle this head on. I give my commitment to you that we will do so, and I condemn all forms of transphobia and bigotry wherever they arise.
- And let me be very clear on this. Trans women are women. Trans men are men. And non-binary people exist. And all of you deserve to be able to access your rights and to live with fundamental human dignity.
- I also say that I will continue to stand with you, and as the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People in the Scottish Government, I will continue to champion your rights and your equality in everything I do.
- We are working hard to achieve our goal of Gender Recognition reform. And I know you will continue to challenge us to make good on our promises.
- Because that's what Pride is all about. You are sending a statement that your rights matter. Let me assure you – I hear you loud and clear and I will continue to stand with you every step of the way.

- Thank you, and have a wonderful day.