Our keynote speaker is Jamie Harrell who is the first openly transgender graduate of the Emory Goizueta MBA program.

You can tell I didn't go to Emory. I'm sorry.

She will be sharing with us her own personal journey as well as the business case that diversity [and] inclusion creates economic value by improving both profits and market share.

Please welcome Jamie who is the business intelligence and analytics lead for Goizueta Business School at Emory.

[Applause]

Media can we have the presentation please?

Thank you there we go

Ladies and gentlemen and non-binaries, welcome to the LGBTW Diversity in Business forum.

I'm so happy to be here today and I'm so happy to have the LGBT Institute to host this events and the Atlanta Business Chronicle to partner in putting it together.
Thank you so much for sponsors our executive sponsors and where is Emory? I hear that Emory is well represented.

And thank you, Ryan, for the opportunity to stand up and to be visible and to be heard. We do this because it's the right thing to do. Thank you. Last year I came to this event and, as far as I knew, I was the only transgender person in the room. Now I don't know, in fact, if in fact I was the only trans person in the room, but it is the week of Transgender Awareness, so if there's any other trans people here today, I would invite you to stand up and be visible.

[Applause]

The very first and the only Georgia transgender politician is represented here today. Stephe Koontz, she was just elected in Doraville.

[Applause]

So I have a confession to make. I’m a bit of a perfectionist and so when I was invited to talk at this event, I started writing my speech and I finished it two months ago.

I did all the research. I had all the data and I created what I believe to be the irrefutable absolute perfect business case for diversity and inclusion in business. The data was down to three decimal points. We had a perfect Big Five management style consulting deck with a five-level issue tree and a three main point executive summary, each with three individual points.
Did I mention I’m a perfectionist?

But then I read an article, that kinda threw me, it challenged my understanding of why we do diversity in business and why it's important. Basically this article said because the business case, the opportunistic cases, the legalistic cases is really only the halfway point... in the thought and the understanding of inclusion in business. And so at that point, I realized that I had to start over.

So I am not going to stand here today and dissect business cases, and give you the absolute perfect case and all the statistics. I am here to connect with you and tell you my story.

You see we're all statistics at some point. But I am a person with hopes and dreams and we do this not for the numbers or the dollars, or a couple of paragraphs in a quarterly report. We do this because it's the right thing to do. Real people and real lives are on the line.

Now if you've ever picked or watched the tube or seen a magazine, you’ve probably see stories about people like me. The transgender person. It could have been a train wreck on Jerry Springer. It could have been a prostitute on Law and Order. Or dancing to Buffalo Bill in Silence of the Lambs. Yeah, our on screen image really could stand to be dolled up a bit folks.
But there's another story you sometimes hear here and this one is, really will Tug-at-your-heartstrings because it's so plausible and it's so believable and sad when you hear it. And it basically goes like this: I knew I was Trans when I was five.

And you hear the story enough and you get the picture that this is what it's like to be trans. But what if you didn’t know when you were five? Could you be trans?

Let me tell you my story. I didn't know, I didn't understand that I was transgender until I was forty. Sure when I was five my sisters loved to play dress-up and they were more than happy to have a live action doll. We did this so often that I got a new notable nickname: Flower. Flower was my childhood drag name. Not too shabby is it?

But it turns out that dressing up does not make you trans. What my sisters never knew, what my parents never knew, was that I continued to play dress-up alone, in my mind. All alone, because as a young child, you learn so quickly that being different will get you teased. That a feminine boy is grounds for possibly violence.

So I hid in shame and alone. And I buried this for as long as I could, but finally at one point came the internet. I learned, you know what, I am not alone. I found community finally, in San Diego.

I was working for a company in San Diego and flying back and forth while living in Atlanta, so often that I actually got an apartment there. And I had previously buried myself so deeply in work. I had started and sold two Internet companies.
I’d been VP in public companies and I had played this picture so well that everyone thought I had it together, but I was conflicted inside.

In my apartment in San Diego I had an entire closet full of beautiful women’s clothes and we would go to work at the office and I would come home that night and I would shave, change, put on makeup, put on a wig and find time and a place to be myself.

I actually found a trans bar in San Diego. Did you know there is such a thing? It was amazing. And that is where I found friends who helped me believe, helped me understand that it’s okay I can be trans, that just maybe I can transition.

But at the age of forty, I had the proverbial midlife crisis. I’d been laid off from work and was unemployed for a year and a half. I had to get rid of my apartment in San Diego. My safe space was gone.

So I was here in Atlanta with my family and my kids, living a double life. When my kids would go to bed, I’d tuck them in and my spouse would go to bed and I would spend two hours getting dressed and go out. And I was drinking too much. I was smoking a pack a day. I would stay out till three o’clock in the morning just to find a place where I could be me. And I was leaving my family behind and I'd come home at three o'clock or four o'clock in the morning when the bars closed and I would sit my desk and stare at myself in the mirror and cry.
I’d stay up as late I could because I couldn’t stand to take off the makeup. Because I knew when I woke up in the morning, I would see James in the mirror.

I would sleep through the weekend mornings --- the best time you have with your kids making pancakes and breakfast and sometimes watching cartoons. I knew I was missing it all. I became a bad parent, a bad partner. Well not even a partner at all.

And then my cousin Emily died. We really weren’t even that close. She was six months younger than me, never a smoker. She died of lung cancer. I realized that her kids would grow up without one of their parents. And it hit me. It hit me really hard and I realized that if I kept going on the path I was on, that my kids would grow up with only one parent, too.

And I couldn’t stand the thought of my children looking over my casket. And to have never really know me. To haven’t ever met Flower.

So I figured I had to get this done. I had to figure it out. I went to trans support groups and I asked the question: How can I be trans when I didn’t know when I was five?

It was that day that I learned that the pop culture definition, what we see in media and on TV is such a narrow picture of the experience of what it is to be trans.
I overcame my own internalized transphobia and on December 1, two years ago, I took the red pill. I decided to stay in Wonderland and to see how deep the rabbit-hole went because the truth is I went to find the truth and I am trans even though I didn’t know when I was five.

Trans is actually pretty wonderful.

SLIDE:
Being trans is rather wonderful sometimes. How many people actually get to experience life in two genders?

SLIDE:
Except going through TSA.Going through TSA while trans really sucks!
--Jamie Harrell, MBA

Did you know they actually have to hit a button? The operator, that says Male or Female. There’s no transgender button.

And here’s this poor TSA agent looking at me while I am waiting for the TSA. You know that sound that you can make that can make your dog turn its head just a little bit? Well that's what they do when I walk through TSA. And of course the alarms go off and the TSA agent walks up to me and says, “Would you like a male or a female agent to give you a pat-down?” and I am thinking which one of them can I make the most uncomfortable as possible?
No being trans is rather wonderful for one thing. I am here to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that chocolate tastes better to women.

[live video cuts for 2 minutes – this section filled in later]

I set a goal to finish my MBA as myself Jamie. I emailed Jules in the program office and my professor Ted Rogers. It was that December the program Dean reintroduced me to my class as Jamie. In May of 2016 I was awarded the MBA core value award for courage for becoming the first openly transgender person to receive their MBA at Emory.

But in the words of Charles Bolden, the first African American to lead NASA, being first is unimportant, unimportant if there is no second and so I became an unwitting activist because visibility is my activism and I can only hope through my efforts and presence that there will not only be a second but a third a fourth and many more.

So why is the work we do so important? Societal acceptance saves lives and business can take the lead where politicians have failed.

A study published this year in JAMA Pediatrics analyzed the youth risk behavior surveillance system data from 1999 to 2015. The authors theorized a correlation between same-sex marriage laws and teen suicide. Their findings showed that in states where marriage equality laws were enacted pre Obergefell, overall teen
suicide attempt rates went down the following year largely concentrated in the LGBTQ community.

The legislation triggered macro-level societal changes that had a real impact on these youth even though they weren't of marrying age. and so you can imagine with the current flurry of discriminatory policies and decisions coming from the highest office in the United States, our transgender youth and employees are today at significantly higher risk than just a year ago.

SLIDE:
From a regional economic perspective, discriminatory policies and legislation play out in a crucial way.

Tom Cunningham, former economist at the Atlanta Federal Reserve Bank, said that Georgia stands to lose $7B if discriminatory legislation such as North Carolina’s HB2 were passed here.

VOICE:
[Live video feed returns]
He tells us it's very simple to calculate the one-time cost of bad legislation such as House Bill 2 as we saw North Carolina. What people often don’t think about is the difference in growth and how that plays out over many many years. People might say but look at North Carolina. It’s not too bad. Their economy is still growing. But think about this in terms of your 401k. If you're earning 5% and I'm earning 15% either I am going to retire a lot earlier than you or a lot wealthier.
So if we look at Atlanta and at Birmingham and the difference between these two cities and what was happening in the 1960s. Business took note that Atlanta had a significantly different attitude with respect to civil rights and business moved here to Atlanta.

Fast forward to today: Atlanta, the greater area, has over 6 million people and we’re ranked 11 in the size of metropolitan areas in the United States. Eleven and Birmingham is 48 with one and one-half million people. Our GDP per capita in Georgia is 20% higher than that of Alabama.

And that's the importance of reduced growth when bad legislation takes over. Compound growth matters. So why is it so important for business? Well businesses typically are willing to make data informed decisions, but in politics sometimes statistics, data, and for that matter, reason, sometimes don’t matter.

See, there’s this type of cognitive dissonance called the Backfire Effect that basically says that when you present facts and figures and data that tell someone that their deeply held belief is incorrect it doesn’t sway their opinion. It doubles them down. On top of this when we talk about equality and rights to conservative audience they think we're already equal. Because they don't see and they don’t experience the inequality they can ignore and dismiss it. When we talk about LGBT rights they hear extra rights. When we talk about LGBT equality they hear special treatment. So we must be really careful in our messaging when we’re talk about LGBT rights.
So how are we doing? Well, we’re doing pretty bad. According to the National Center for Transgender Equality over 25% of transgender people lose their job as a result of transition. 50% of transgender people experience an adverse job outcome whether that’s loss of job, not getting hired, not getting the promotion, getting put on a timeout assignment or getting taken away from that client facing or high project profile.

We have twice the unemployment rate and transgender people of color face four times the unemployment rate. 50% of transgender people report being harassed on the job and 97% report harassment, mistreatment or discrimination on the job including verbal abuse, invasion of privacy, physical and sexual assault. So we’re not doing very well.

So it's become my mission to normalize being transgender in business. It’s time for everyone to accept transgender people in office and in particular non-binary people because if that’s our target we’re going to be doing pretty good. Help me eliminate the phrase: I’m full time except for at work. I’m full time except for at work. Meaning I've transitioned in every aspect of my life except for work. So many trans people say this to me. I've heard it time and time again but why?

Because of the numbers. Without our jobs we don't have access to therapists that help us overcome our internalized transphobia. Without our jobs we don't have access to health insurance to see our physicians. If we can’t see our physicians, we can't get our hormone replacement therapy medications that so often are so
important make sure than our internal view is reconciled with our external. So yeah. We are afraid.

So how do we effect change? To counteract the backfire, we must often start with the business case for diversity even though it's the midpoint. We start there because from this perspective of helping the bottom line we're seen as a partner in the business and not a threat to conservatives’ beliefs.

And Rodrigo Heng-Lehtinen of Freedom for All Americans, a think tank that has looked into ways to message LGBTQ issues to conservative organizations, has found that by just changing our language a little bit we can have a much better chance of success. By changing the words in our messaging from rights and quality to freedoms of opportunity, we will have a 30% more chance of having a positive conversation with a conservative.

And in politics, change is measured in decades, but in business change is measured by the 10 Q, the quarterly earnings report. And since decisions can be made based on data in business and fortunately for us the data says that diversity and inclusion is good for business.

So in my final minute, I’m actually over time, and this is the pitch I wrote two months ago. So I am going to read straight from my notes. This is what I believe would be an irrefutable business case for diversity and inclusion in business and I hope our panelists will talk a little bit about these today. Diversity stimulates your people to work hard. It improves employee engagement. It improves employee
retention and ENDA’s and a fair workplace give you access to more talent. Diversity improves the performance of teams and helps you connect with more customers.

It's been proven that diversity across multiple dimensions helps create better decisions and it eliminates group think. Diverse teams create more innovative products and you have access to a broader customer base. Companies that take diversity and inclusion seriously have statistically higher profits, achieve higher growth and combined together that creates economic value and so they perform better in a stock market.

I'm Jamie Harrell and I hope that someday I will not be and we will not be the only transgender professionals that you know. Thank you for attending the LGBTQ opportunity in business forum.

[Applause]