Moments before the Motor City Pride parade and festival kicked off Sunday in downtown Detroit, and as a decision over marriage equality by the U.S. Supreme Court looms, members of Michigan’s LGBT community acknowledge the fight is far from over.

“We speak to legislators about ... the way we put it ‘Married on Saturday, fired on Monday.’ People are coming out more, getting married. Unfortunately the state of Michigan lags many states in its friendliness to the LGBT community,” said Bill Greene, interim executive director of Equality Michigan.

That includes the fact that the state’s civil rights act does not include LGBT as a protected class, Greene said.

Leaders of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups gathered for a news conference Sunday morning with corporate sponsor Fiat Chrysler Automobiles as the Motor City Pride festival in downtown Detroit geared up for its second day.

This is the fourth year that FCA US, formerly Chrysler Group LLC, has been a lead sponsor of the Motor City Pride parade and festival. A specially wrapped 2016 Fiat 500X served as grand marshal of the 2015 Motor City Pride parade.

The driving force behind the FCA US sponsorship of Motor City Pride is its LGBT Employee Resource Group: the Gay and Lesbian Alliance (GALA). GALA is one of six groups that enable FCA US employees to celebrate their special attributes together, while bringing awareness and value through volunteer and charitable activities.

FCA US was among U.S. employers in providing domestic partner benefits to its employees in 2000 and has achieved a perfect score of 100 percent on the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) Corporate Equality Index nine times since the benchmark was established.

The HRC is the educational arm of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, America’s largest civil rights organization, and is dedicated to achieving LGBT equality. The company is the only automaker to consistently achieve a perfect CEI rating.

Casey Hurbis, head of marketing for FIAT North America, FCA US, said its been an interesting journey for the FIAT after coming back to the U.S. after being away for 26 years, missing three generations of car users.

“We did a lot of grassroots events. We put our toe in the water in pride events in certain markets around the country and got immediate great feedback at these pride events. Our dealers started explaining they were seeing folks from LGBT take a lot of interest in the FIAT brand. That was amazing for us,” Hurbis said. “We are now participating in dozens of pride festivals all over the country. ...We are celebrating the LGBT community.”

General Motors Co. will also have a presence at Motor City Pride with a few vehicle displays and will have a Chevrolet Traverse print ad in Between the Lines newspaper. GM in 2012 ran an award-winning print ad featuring the Chevrolet Volt parked between a Chevy Tahoe and Cruze and said: “Mom, Dad, I’m electric.”

The Traverse ad has stick figure stickers on the back window of the hatchback, featuring kids and two mothers.

The automaker has an employee resource group for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees called GM Plus (People Like Us) since 1993 that has worked for equal treatment and safe working conditions for all GM employees.

The company next week will host voluntary training for employees in some Michigan facilities by PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). Automakers for more than a decade have offered domestic partner health benefits. Last year, GM received a 100 percent score on the 2015 Corporate Equality Index, a national survey on corporate policies related to LGBT workplace equality by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation.

A GM spokesman said the company conducts marketing outreach and works with community groups and organizations throughout the year, not just during June, which is LGBT Pride Month. The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities are among GM’s top diversity focuses.

The automaker has pushed the envelope with LGBT focused advertising. In 1995, its Saturn brand was first to run an auto ad in a national LGBT magazine. And during the 2014 Winter Olympics, GM ran two Chevrolet ads that featured gay couples, reportedly the first company to air advertising with gay couples during an Olympic broadcast.
Ford Motor Company, the UAW-Ford Joint Diversity Committee and Ford GLOBE were also involved in this year's events, with vehicles on display, consumer engagement activities and parade participants.

Ford Motor Company has 11 Employee Resource Groups. Ford GLOBE is Ford Motor Company’s Employee Resource Group for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender and all hourly, salaried and agency employees. GLOBE was established 21 years ago.

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