

The International Human Rights Defense Act (S. 2472)

Senator Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.)

Endorsed by: Amnesty International USA, Council for Global Equality, RFK Center for Human Rights, Human Rights Campaign, Freedom House, Human Rights First, American Jewish World Service, National Center for Transgender Equality, International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, Advocates for Youth, MassEquality

In 2013, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) equality movement experienced a number of major triumphs, including the overturning of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Yet, in other countries, the global movement for equality suffered a number of serious setbacks. Russia enacted a ban on arbitrarily-defined “homosexual propaganda,” endangering the position of many LGBT persons and their allies. India’s Supreme Court overturned a lower court ruling and reinstated the nation’s criminalization of homosexuality in the world’s second largest country. And Nigeria went even further, passing a law that makes homosexuality a crime punishable by death.

Sadly, in 2014 the trend has continued abroad. Uganda passed a similar law to Nigeria’s and Ethiopia has indicated that it may do the same. It is critical that the United States fight for LGBT equality both at home, and abroad. The President, as well as both Secretaries Clinton and Kerry have affirmed the United States’ commitment to LGBT equality as a critical component of our international human rights objectives. However, our government does not yet have a comprehensive strategy for addressing LGBT discrimination overseas. We do not even have one central individual office responsible for inter-bureau and inter-agency coordination to achieve these objectives.

The *International Human Rights Defense Act* would direct the Department of State to make international LGBT human rights a foreign policy priority and would establish a position in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor responsible for coordinating that effort.

Legislative Summary

This Act directs the Department of State to:

- Make preventing and responding to discrimination and violence against the LGBT community a foreign policy priority and devise a global strategy to achieve those goals.
- Coordinate efforts to promote international LGBT human rights with local advocacy groups, governments, multilateral organizations, and the private sector.
- Create the position of “Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBT Peoples” in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, which will be responsible for all inter-bureau and inter-agency coordination of the United States government’s efforts to defend human rights for the LGBT community internationally.
- Continue to include a section on LGBT international human rights in the annual State Department Report on Human Rights.

Original Cosponsors: Senators Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), Patty Murray (D-Wash.), Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Ben Cardin (D-Md.), Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisc.), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), Jeff Merkley (D-Oreg.), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.), Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii), Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Cory Booker (D-N.J.), Chris Coons (D-Del.), Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), Al Franken (D-Minn.), and Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.)