

The International Human Rights Defense Act of 2015

Senator Edward J. Markey (D-MA)

Endorsed by the Human Rights Campaign, Advocates For Youth, American Jewish World Service, Human Rights First, Freedom House, Equality Federation, Council for Global Equality, Anti-Defamation League, Global Justice Institute, Metropolitan Community Churches, the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, PFLAG National, Transgender Law Center, Out & Equal Workplace Advocates, and International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission.

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) equality movement experienced a number of major triumphs in recent years, 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. Russia’s law has been the basis for similar legislation threatened or introduced in countries across Eastern Europe and Central Asia, including Lithuania, Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus. In December 2013, India’s Supreme Court reversed a lower court ruling and reinstated the criminalization of homosexuality in the second most populous nation on earth. Nigeria, Uganda, and Gambia have all passed laws that make homosexuality a crime punishable with life imprisonment. While Uganda’s law was overturned by its Constitutional Court, leaders have pledged to pursue similar legislation. Conditions for transgender individuals are particularly troubling in Brazil, where 113 transgender individuals were murdered in a one-year period.

In light of these alarming developments, Senator Markey is reintroducing the International Human Rights Defense Act of 2015. 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 of 2015* 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 Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Patty Murray (D-WA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Chris Coons (D-DE), Al Franken (D-MN), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Charles Schumer (D-NY), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Cory Booker (D-NY), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Bob Casey (D-PA), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT)