

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 25, 2015

The Honorable Senator Graham
Chairman
Subcommittee on Foreign Operations
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Senator Leahy
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Foreign Operations
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Graham and Ranking Member Leahy,

We write to express our strong support for providing \$250,000 to the LGBT Special Envoy office within the Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor to help defend and promote the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people around the world.

While LGBT persons have made much progress within the United States and in some areas of the world, their struggle for equality and justice abroad remains significant. Many countries have laws that criminalize homosexuality, prohibit public support of the LGBT community and persecute those who identify as LGBT. To adequately address the challenges posed by these discriminatory laws, the United States must make LGBT rights a priority in our foreign policy, and there needs to be dedicated position responsible for coordinating that effort.

Over the past few years, conditions have deteriorated for LGBT individuals in many regions of the world. Russia enacted a ban on arbitrarily-defined "homosexual propaganda," endangering the position of many LGBT individuals 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.

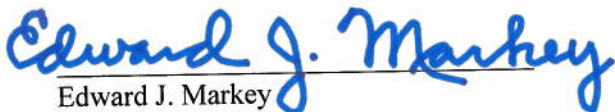
The International Human Rights Defense Act of 2015 (S.302) called for the establishment of an LGBT Special Envoy in the Department of State. We are pleased that the Obama Administration has recognized the importance of having a coordinated policy to promote and defend LGBT rights around the world. In February 2015 Secretary of State John Kerry announced the appointment of Randy Barry as the first Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBT Persons.

Unfortunately, the creation of this much needed position occurred too late for President Obama to include appropriate funding in his FY2016 Budget request. Therefore, we request that the Subcommittee ensure that this position is adequately supported by providing \$250,000 to the LGBT Special Envoy office within the Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. It is essential that the LGBT Special Envoy have appropriate funding support to carry out his mission to affirm and strengthen

the United States' commitment to LGBT equality as a critical component of our international human rights objectives.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Al Franken
United States Senator



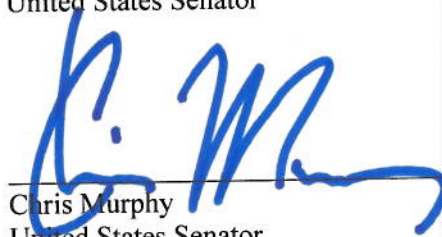
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Benjamin Cardin
United States Senator



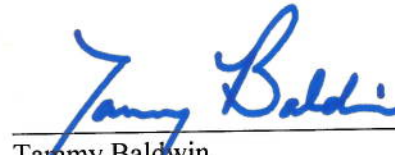
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Chris Murphy
United States Senator



Mazie Hirono
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator