

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 19, 2017

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary of State
U. S. Department of State
Washington, DC

The Honorable Nikki Haley
United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations
United States Mission to the United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Dear Secretary Tillerson and Ambassador Haley,

We write to express concern about credible reports of the detention and torture of approximately 100 gay men in Chechnya based solely on their sexual orientation. We are especially disturbed by reports that Chechen authorities have been responsible for the deaths of at least three of these men, and the *Novaya Gazeta* reporter who broke the story told the *Washington Post* that she is fleeing the country in response to Chechen religious leaders' attempts to incite people to "massacre journalists." While Russia's Commissioner for Human Rights, Tatyana Moskalkova, opened an investigation, a Chechen government spokesperson denied the reports, stating, "You cannot detain and oppress those who simply do not exist in the republic." We urge you to use all diplomatic tools at your disposal to urge the Russian government to investigate and address reports of gross human rights abuses against members of the LGBTI community.

Secretary Tillerson, in your response to Questions for the Record during your confirmation process, you wrote, "The United States needs to stand firmly for all human rights. This includes...non-discrimination against women, minorities, and LGBT persons. Indeed, the denial of basic freedoms is often the backdrop against which discrimination against LGBT persons takes place." Ambassador Haley, in response to a question during your confirmation hearing about the need to promote LGBT rights abroad, you said, "It's something I will always fight for."

Russia's record on LGBT rights is clearly inconsistent with the principles of LGBT rights and nondiscrimination. That is true not only with respect to its treatment of the LGBT community in Russia, but also in its approach at the United Nations, where Russian officials have undertaken repeated efforts to block attempts to address LGBT issues.

Because Russia is a member of the Council of Europe, it is a party to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. That Convention guarantees a broad range of rights and freedoms for all people—without exception—including

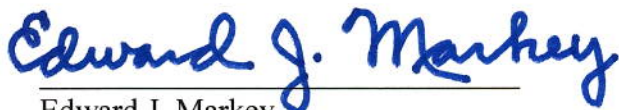
the right to life and prohibition of torture, the right to liberty and security, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly and association. These reports constitute multiple, clear, and deplorable violations of basic human rights and international norms, and the international community must stand together to make it clear that such actions are unacceptable.

While we welcome the Department's initial April 6 statement on this issue and Ambassador Haley's April 17 statement, the United States must do more. As Russian LGBT Network spokesman Mikhail Tumasov said, "What is happening now is threatening the security of Russia, and should be of concern not only to the Russian government, but other governments all over the world as well...Foreign governments should express their concern and demand that Russian authorities bring those responsible to justice."

For that reason, we urge you to continue to strongly condemn these actions and to engage with Russia to promote adherence to international human rights norms. Further, our Russian counterparts should be encouraged to bring to justice anyone who participated in these detentions and murders, and to take firm steps to prevent such actions in the future. Should the European Court on Human Rights pursue action, we must encourage Russia's full cooperation.

The detention, torture, or murder of members of the LGBT community represents a deplorable violation of fundamental human rights. The United States must lead the world community to condemn such a violation, in Russia or anywhere else, and we must take steps to address them. We must stand in solidarity with those brave enough to fight for basic human rights around the world, and rally the entire world to do the same.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



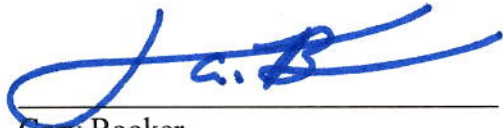
Todd Young
United States Senator



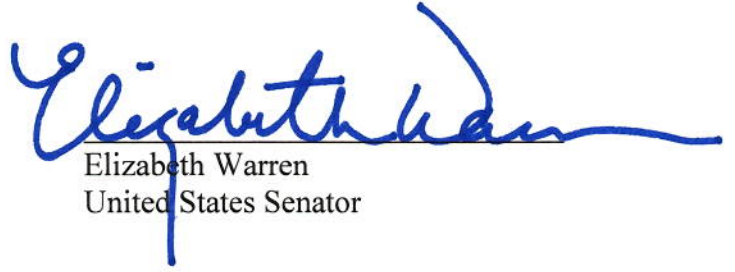
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United States Senator



Jeff Merkley
United States Senator



Cory Booker
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



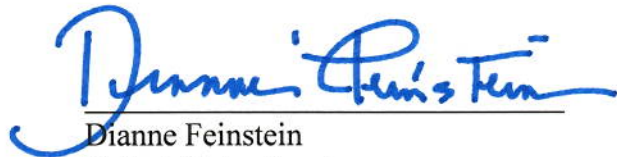
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United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



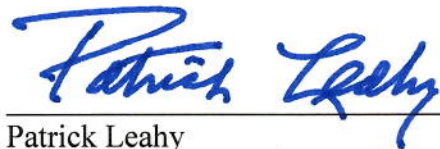
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