

The Council for Global Equality



Advancing an American Foreign Policy
Inclusive of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

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Chairman Howard L. Berman
Committee on Foreign Affairs
United States House of Representatives
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Mr. Chairman:

I write on behalf of the Council for Global Equality in support of the provisions pertaining to sexual orientation contained in the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011.

The Council for Global Equality (www.GlobalEquality.org) is an alliance of prominent and respected U.S. human rights and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) advocacy organizations. Our goal is to seek a stronger U.S. voice on behalf of fair treatment and equal citizen rights for LGBT individuals at home and abroad.

LGBT-inclusive workplace policies at the Department of State are essential to this goal; so is greater vigilance in how the Department reports on and responds to growing evidence of a genuine crisis in human rights abuse directed at LGBT individuals in many countries around the globe.

We commend in particular the following provisions of the bill, contained in Section 333:

- ***Foreign Service Same-Sex Partner Provisions:*** This provision of the bill would direct the Department of State to correct workplace policies that discriminate against LGBT personnel and their families who serve their country abroad. Current Department policies are inherently incompatible with fundamental American practices of fair and equal workplace treatment. These policies also are counter to critical U.S. interests in assuring the health, safety, counter-intelligence protection, and effectiveness of our embassy communities abroad. Finally, correcting these policies, as the Committee's bill would do, is essential to effective workplace recruitment and retention for the Department.

- ***Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity:*** Importantly, the bill instructs the Department to pay greater attention to a growing crisis of LGBT-focused human rights abuse abroad, through both (a) a modest allotment of personnel resources to ensure appropriate attention to LGBT inequalities, and (b) ensuring that LGBT-related human rights abuses are treated consistently within the framework of the human rights report. These provisions are sorely needed. In 2008, discrimination against LGBT individuals was noted in the majority of country human rights reports. Human rights abuses include abridgement of a range of fundamental citizen rights, including freedoms of speech, assembly and association; LGBT citizens were also deprived of consensual same-sex relations and relationships. In many countries, government officials and/or security forces appear to have been complicit in human rights abuses, or in their tacit encouragement. Shining a spotlight on these abuses, which appear to affect LGBT individuals and communities disproportionately, is critical to respect for our country based on the consistency of our principles.
- ***Global Decriminalization:*** The bill correctly notes that the Obama Administration's March 2009 endorsement of efforts at the United Nations to encourage the decriminalization of homosexuality worldwide must be followed through if that endorsement is to carry meaning. We see this provision of the bill as fully in keeping with U.S. law, with fundamental American principles of equality and fairness, and with the advocacy role expected of our embassies in advancing U.S. foreign policy goals. These efforts are aimed at supporting the fundamental human rights of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- ***Training:*** Finally, strengthened reporting on LGBT issues requires greater factual knowledge of the environment in which homophobic policies and practices take hold. To improve advocacy of U.S. principles and policies, LGBT issues equally need to be worked into appropriate courses aimed at strengthening the skills of those who must advance U.S. interests abroad. We therefore see this provision of the bill as essential to the effectiveness of other provisions.

We are grateful for your leadership on these matters and look forward to committee and full House passage of the bill.

Sincerely,



Mark Bromley
Council Chair