

May 18, 2009

The Honorable Howard Berman
Chair, Committee on Foreign Affairs
United States House of Representatives
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I write to express my gratitude for your leadership in including domestic partner benefits provisions within the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011.

For me, this legislation is intensely personal. For 26 years, I proudly served my country as a Foreign Service Officer of the Department of State. I willingly accepted that my job entailed regular moves abroad; so did my partner, although moving required him to give up his job and put his career goals on hold. My partner did this not only out of love for me, but out of love for this country, and for what it represents.

What neither of us could accept was that the same government and country we served would in turn honor that service by treating him as a second-class citizen. Specifically, the Department refused to:

- train him, as spouses are trained, in how to recognize a potential terrorist or counter-intelligence threat – thereby putting his life and the security of our embassy community at risk;
- train him in the informal community leadership roles that he, like spouses at senior levels (Ambassador or Deputy Chief of Mission), was expected to fill – a loss to the community as a whole;
- provide him and other partners with equal access to embassy medical services, even in countries where medical care is poor or in cases dangerous;
- evacuate him, as it would other family members, should an urgent or life-threatening medical condition arise that could not be treated locally;
- assure us that, in the event of danger or instability, he would be evacuated with other members of the embassy community;
- support his visa needs, to ensure that we could remain together for the duration of my assignment abroad;
- allow him to compete for open jobs at the embassy, even where he might have been best-qualified or where his background and skill sets might have contributed to embassy effectiveness;
- train him in languages and area studies, to empower his ability to represent our country effectively in diplomatic settings; or even
- pay for my partner's transportation to and from post, in stark contrast to the full reimbursement it gave for our pet's transportation.

Mr. Chairman, you and I grew up believing in an America that stands for fairness and equality. The State Department policies noted above are glaring reminders of the legal and regulatory discrimination that those of us who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender face in daily life. Discrimination such as this simply is not in keeping with our country's founding principles. This double standard deserves no place in any public U.S. institution.

I want to be clear that those of us who support this provision are not asking for "special rights." We never will. What we ask is that our country live up to its ideals. Men and women who work side-by-side, under identical conditions of service, should be accorded equal workplace treatment, for us and for our families. This is a matter of principle, and indeed of national integrity. Anything short of full and equal treatment dishonors the service of LGBT Americans, fails our families, and tarnishes our country's integrity.

When I ended my career over this matter in November 2007, I spoke of the choice I felt compelled to make between service to my country and obligations to my partner, who is my family. I urge that this provision be passed so that others will never again face such a choice. And I urge it be passed with full bipartisan support, so that equality as an American principle is not seen as a partisan matter.

With my great respect and, again, my heartfelt gratitude, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Amb. Michael Guest, ret.