

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 18, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write regarding the continued challenges surrounding diplomatic accreditation faced by LGBTQI+ Department of State employees and their spouses. This issue should be proactively raised in all relevant bilateral meetings by Department leaders, especially at the Chief of Mission level abroad and at the Front Office or higher level domestically.

One of the Department of State's highest priorities is supporting its employees and fostering meaningful inclusion and professional advancement for underrepresented communities. To fulfill these commitments, the Department must ensure that all employees and their family members regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity receive full diplomatic privileges and immunities when assigned to all posts overseas. More than one-third of the world, roughly 70 countries, continue to deny visas to same-sex spouses. This effectively renders a vast swath of overseas assignments unbiddable to many Foreign Service families. We are concerned that the Department of State has left this issue unresolved for too long, utilizing "workarounds" instead of addressing the problem. We urge you to prioritize raising diplomatic accreditation for same-sex partners at the highest levels in all interactions internally and externally.

We are encouraged to learn that several additional countries in the Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA) and Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) regions are finalizing agreements to soon begin accrediting spouses of the same sex. We understand that the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, through the leadership of Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Joey Hood, has been at the forefront of developing successful strategies for engagement on this issue with countries in their region. We hope that you will promote and employ the tactics developed by the NEA Bureau, such as raising the issue of diplomatic accreditation at the Ambassadorial level in addition to Management Counselors and other working level officials, as well as encourage other regional, and where appropriate functional, Bureaus to replicate this model.

We further urge you to promote equal diplomatic accreditation for LGBTQI+ spouses as a Chief of Mission priority in Integrated Country Strategies in countries where same-sex couples are currently denied full privileges and immunities and in other high-level Department strategic planning. By including diplomatic accreditation as a mission priority, Department leadership ensures that attention and resources are dedicated to advancing change. Additionally, we encourage you to develop a robust reporting mechanism that allows Ambassadors and Chiefs of

Mission to easily share feedback on successful or unsuccessful strategies, which can be used to the advantage of missions in similar situations.

As guaranteed by the Vienna Convention, our diplomats and their family members should be accredited and receive full diplomatic protections and immunities in the countries to which they are assigned, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Thank you for ensuring that resolving this issue remains a priority.

Sincerely,



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



Gregory W. Meeks
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee



David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



Dina Titus
Member of Congress



William R. Keating
Member of Congress

/s
Gerald Connolly
Member of Congress



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress

/s
Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress

/s
Albio Sires
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Mark Takano
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Zoe Lofgren
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Sean Casten
Member of Congress

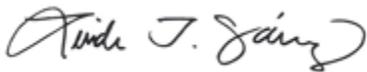


Dean Phillips
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
Carolyn B. Maloney
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Chris Pappas
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Nydia M. Velázquez
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