

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 2, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to commend the State Department for taking swift action to implement President Biden’s expansive commitment to “pursue an end to violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics, and to lead by the power of our example in the cause of advancing the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons around the world.” At the same time, we also write regarding the need for additional steps to support LGBTQ asylum seekers.

The United States has been a beacon of hope for many LGBTQ migrants escaping persecution, including domestic violence, rape, and murder, as well as discrimination in areas like education, employment, housing, and healthcare. An estimated 11,400 applications for asylum were filed in the United States on the basis of LGBTQ status from 2012 to 2017.

Federal law gives asylum seekers the right to seek asylum upon arrival in the United States, irrespective of any prior authorization or inspection. It was therefore encouraging to learn that the Department of Justice reversed previous rulings severely limiting asylum seekers’ ability to claim asylum over credible fears of domestic abuse or gang violence—issues endemic to many of the nations from which LGBTQ people are fleeing. The recent decision by the Department of Homeland Security to expand on President Biden’s termination of the Migrant Protection Protocols program will also allow migrants to return to the United States while their asylum claims are reviewed.

Under your leadership, the Department of State has acted quickly to reestablish U.S. foreign policy positions that meet our commitment to defending the lives of LGBTQ people worldwide. We are also glad to see the Department’s proactive leadership on these issues, including public condemnation of human rights abuses of LGBTQ people in response to protests in Turkey.

In February, you outlined the Department’s commitment to “use a broad range of diplomatic and programmatic tools and resources to protect vulnerable LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers.” Accordingly, we request answers to the following questions on what steps the State Department is taking to protect and promote the rights of LGBTQ asylum seekers:

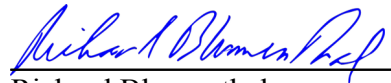
- What are the Department's plans for restoring our former commitments to LGBTQ refugees and asylum seekers and expediting resettlement for the most at-risk LGBTQ refugees globally?
- What progress has been made in the Department's global strategy to address discrimination against the LGBTQ community and to integrate LGBTQ concerns into U.S. foreign policy? In what ways can Congress assist in these efforts, including and beyond the Global Equality Fund (GEF)?

We look forward to your response and to working with you to address these critical issues.

Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
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Tina Smith
United States Senator



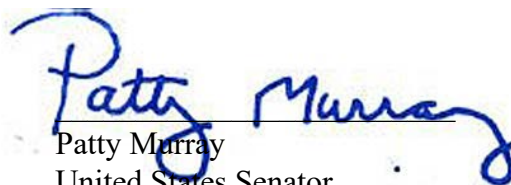
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator