

August 16, 2024

Shalanda Young
Director, Office of Management and Budget
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20503

Director Young:

The undersigned 101 organizations respectfully urge you to support increased funding for global LGBTQI+ rights programs at the State Department's Global Equality Fund to \$40 million and USAID's Inclusive Development Hub's Protection of LGBTQI+ Persons to \$40 million in the President's Budget Request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026.

Over the course of the last three and a half years, the Biden Administration has sought to reestablish the United States as a leader in protecting and promoting LGBTQI+ rights both at home and around the world. Through the Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Persons Around the World ("Memorandum"), Executive Order 13985 on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government, Executive Order 14075 on Advancing Equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Individuals, and a variety of additional strategies and frameworks, the Administration has sought to ensure that LGBTQI+ rights are a core component of U.S. foreign policy goals. However, these policies are only as effective as their implementation allows and it is imperative that the Administration aligns U.S. financial investments with its policy agenda in order to meet the dangerous moment facing the global LGBTQI+ community.

Today, sixty-three countries continue to criminalize consensual same-sex sexual acts. Twelve of these countries have jurisdictions in which same-sex relations are punishable by death.¹ Many more countries continue to be dangerous, and even deadly, for LGBTQI+ people even after the implementation of protective laws. And though several countries have made great strides in promoting LGBTQI+ rights – Thailand's Parliament passed legislation to legalize same-sex marriage; Namibia's High Court struck down the country's criminalization statutes; and the courts in Hong Kong, Czechia, and Japan rejected compulsory surgical requirements to change legal gender markers – opponents of LGBTQI+ rights have been emboldened and anti-rights groups, including those from the United States, are pouring money into advancing global homophobia and transphobia.²

As a result, there is a wave of anti-LGBTQI+ persecution, threatening the decades-long progress made by LGBTQI+ human rights defenders. Last year, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni signed into law the draconian Anti-Homosexuality Act that added additional criminal penalties for same-sex sexual conduct, including the death penalty for certain "serial" offenses, and a 20-year prison sentence for the "promotion" of homosexuality, spurring a wave of evictions, arrests, and violence against the community. This legislation has inspired other legislatures on the continent to introduce or pass similar bills, including

¹ Human Dignity Trust. <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/>

² Perkins, Tom. "US religious right at center of anti-LGBTQ+ message pushed around the world." The Guardian, July 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/09/us-religious-right-lgbtq-global-culture-fronts>

in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, and Senegal. This trend is not contained to Africa. In Russia, the Supreme Court banned the “international LGBT movement,” labeling it as an “extremist” and authorities have begun to jail or fine individuals who display rainbow-colored items. And in Iraq, the government signed into law a bill that criminalized LGBTQ+ individuals and banned human rights advocacy, a significant step back in the region. Meanwhile, countries like Uzbekistan and Egypt continue to use the practice of forced anal examinations, a form of torture, against those in the LGBTQI+ community for criminal prosecutions.

These attacks and others have forced LGBTQI+ rights advocates to conduct emergency response campaigns while navigating everyday barriers to basic services with limited funding. LBQ, trans, and intersex organizations are particularly underfunded, with many organizations operating on less than \$10,000 per year. For many LGBTQI+ organizations, including those in countries where same-sex relations remain illegal, there is no funding available due in part to increasing crackdowns on civic space. Despite these funding gaps, between 2021 to 2022, global LGBTQI+ funding from donor governments made up less than 4 cents out of every \$100 of international development efforts and assistance.³

The limited funding available for global equality and inclusion initiatives undermines broader national security and development goals. A report from the Williams Institute found that countries with stronger democracies also had higher rates of LGBTQ+ acceptance, while attacks on LGBTQ+ people could be a precursor for democratic backsliding.⁴ Meanwhile, criminalization statutes have also been linked to higher HIV rates and decreased access to HIV treatment and prevention services, which undermines the success of the United States’ investments in PEPFAR.⁵ And other economic studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between the inclusion and enactment of rights for LGBTQI+ people and growth in GDP,⁶ with one study finding that one enacted law in support of LGBTQI+ people is associated with \$2,065 more in GDP per capita,⁷ as well as a higher value in human development.

Funding Requests

The United States has a long path ahead of it to truly champion LGBTQI+ rights. For the United States to be on par with leading government donors in this sector, the U.S. would need to contribute at least 0.3% of our official development assistance (ODA), which would considerably increase funding for LGBTQI+ rights programs to over \$100 million annually.⁸ According to the Amsterdam Network,⁹ LGBTQI+

³ “Global Resources Report: Government and Philanthropic Support for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Communities 2021/2022.” Global Philanthropy Project, Global Philanthropy Project, June 2024, https://globalresourcesreport.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GRR_2021-2022_WEB-SinglePage-Colour_EN.pdf.

⁴ Flores, Andrew R. et al. “Democratic Backsliding and LGBTI Acceptance.” The Williams Institute, The Williams Institute, Sep. 2023, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/GAI-Democracy-Sep-2023.pdf>

⁵ “Progress and the Peril: HIV and the Global De/criminalization of Same-Sex Sex.” The HIV Policy Lab at Georgetown Law’s O’Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law and UNAIDS, Nov. 2023, <https://hivpolicylab.org/documents/reports/2023GlobalReport/2023%20Policy%20Lab%20Report%20on%20Decriminalization.pdf>.

⁶ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/reports/2020/11/16/492936/transforming-u-s-foreign-policy-ensure-dignity-rights-lgbti-people/>

⁷ Badgett, M.V. Lee, et al. “Links Between Economic Development and New Measures of LGBT Inclusion.” The Williams Institute, The Williams Institute, Mar. 2018, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Global-Economy-and-LGBT-Inclusion-Mar-2018.pdf>.

⁸ For the U.S. to be on par with the Netherlands, Norway or Sweden in terms of average percentage of our ODA dedicated to LGBTQI+ funding, the U.S. would need to grow to over \$100 million annually according to the Global Philanthropy Project’s Global Resource Report. “2017-2018 Global Resources Report: Government & Philanthropic Support for LGBTI Communities.” Global Philanthropy Project, Global Philanthropy Project, 12 Oct. 2021, <https://globalresourcesreport.org/>.

⁹ The Amsterdam Network is a global coalition of LGBTQI+ national organizations working with their governments to ensure the attention to the human rights of LGBTQI+ people around the world.

supportive governments should aim to increase the percentage of their foreign assistance to LGBTQI+ rights work to 1% over the next ten years. These targets should be a long-term goal for the United States as additional investments now in the State Department's GEF and USAID's LGBTQI+ programs will strengthen the capacity of these mechanisms to reach these funding levels in the future.

Any increase in the FY 2026 funding levels for global LGBTQI+ rights programs should not come at the expense of other poverty-focused development, global health, humanitarian aid, women's empowerment, and gender equality programs, or programs focused on other marginalized communities. Overall increases in the Democracy Fund and Development Assistance accounts are also warranted to ensure that marginalized population programs are funded at levels commensurate with need.

Fund the State Department's Global Equality Fund at no less than \$40 million.

Located at the State Department and run through the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), the GEF is a leading and highly leveraged public-private partnership of 21 governments and private sector entities dedicated to protecting and defending the human rights and fundamental freedom of LGBTQI+ persons around the world. The GEF leverages pooled investments across entities, providing over \$100 million to LGBTQI+ organizations in 100 countries in its 10 years of operation. Through the GEF's funding, over 1,400 human rights defenders and 200 civil society organizations have received emergency assistance, with 99% of beneficiaries reporting that this assistance improved their safety and security. Today, the GEF funds more than 175 LGBTQI+ organizations around the world.

The U.S. contribution of \$25 million to the GEF in the FY 2023 appropriations bill was a historic highwater mark for U.S. support of LGBTQI+ rights around the world. The increased investments in the GEF have opened up new opportunities for the State Department to bolster the movement for global equality. This includes expanding funding to medium-sized LGBTQI+ organizations, creating funds for under-resourced organizations in the movement, and strengthening regional efforts to respond to emergencies. As a part of the Summit for Democracy, the GEF also launched the Global LGBTQI+ Inclusive Democracy and Empowerment (GLIDE) Fund, a mechanism elevating the participation of LGBTQI+ individuals in political institutions, processes, and governance to bolster democratic movements around the world.

Even with these increases, LGBTQI+ funding demands significantly exceed funds available to GEF. It is estimated that the GEF is able to meet just 10% of the total funding requests it receives, whereas similar programs at the State Department are estimated to be able to meet 20% of funding requests. Additional investments in the GEF would enable the State Department to strengthen the capacity of LGBTQI+ organizations, both through administrative and operational means; build networks of intermediary funders to sustain regional and global LGBTQI+ movements; attend to the increasing security threats, particularly the rise of violence and anti-LGBTQI+ legislation, facing organizations and human rights defenders; and support historically underfunded regions of the world, including the Middle East and North Africa and Asia and the Pacific.

Fund USAID Inclusive Development Hub's Protection of LGBTQI+ Persons at no less than \$40 million.

USAID LGBTQI+ programs focus on anti-LGBTQI+ violence, discrimination, stigma, and criminalization. USAID hosts mechanisms that respond to urgent or unanticipated threats to LGBTQI+ individuals and focus on bridging gaps between human rights and inclusive development programming for LGBTQI+ communities. Administrator Power recognized that USAID's programs for marginalized groups, like LGBTQI+ persons, "come on the basis of demands from our more than 80 missions around the world and where the need is the greatest, where the vulnerability is the greatest." These programs have supported LGBTQI+ economic empowerment and inclusion in Serbia's workplaces and business communities, the development of a national agenda for Dominican LGBTQI+ civil society groups, and activities in Lesotho to counter gender-based violence impacting LGBTQI+ individuals.

Congress has increased funding for USAID's LGBTQI+ programs since FY 2019, securing a record \$25m for the program in FY 2023. The additional funding has allowed USAID to build stronger partnerships through its programs, set up new mechanisms that respond to emergencies and strengthen capacity in inclusive development programming, and develop a series of programs focused on strategic communications and social behavior changes for LGBTQI+ rights in two regions of the world. In 2022, USAID was also able to launch the Rainbow Fund, which is an incentive fund that enabled missions to apply directly for LGBTQI+ funding and has led to more than 50% of missions supporting LGBTQI+ inclusive development programming, a significant increase over previous years.

Despite the increases, USAID's LGBTQI+ programs continue to face high demands for funding, particularly with the recent launch of the Agency's LGBTQI+ Inclusive Development Policy. It is estimated that current funding is only able to support roughly one-quarter of the received demand from USAID missions through two funding mechanisms. For example, 37 missions expressed an interest in funding roughly \$41m worth of LGBTQI+ inclusive development programming. Overall, the LGBTQI+ portfolio will only be able to provide a total of \$10m to missions, despite the high demand for investments in this area.

As you consider the President's Budget Request for FY 2026, we hope that the Administration will request sufficient resources for global LGBTQI+ programs that make our world safer and more secure for all its citizens, no matter who they are or whom they love. We look forward to the Administration's continued commitments to global LGBTQI+ rights becoming action and advancing this work together. Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

1. Advocates for Youth
2. Ameinu
3. American Atheists
4. American Jewish World Service
5. amfAR
6. Amnesty International USA

7. Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice
8. AVAC
9. CA LGBTQ Health and Human Services Network
10. Center for Biological Diversity
11. Center for Reproductive Rights
12. Center for Values in International Development
13. CenterLink: The Community of LGBTQ Centers
14. Church World Service
15. Council for Global Equality
16. Equality California
17. Equimundo
18. Family Equality
19. Fenway Health
20. Foreign Policy for America
21. FORGE, Inc.
22. Fòs Feminista
23. Foundation Earth
24. Friends Committee on National Legislation
25. GLAAD
26. GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ+ Equality
27. Global Black Gay Men Connect
28. Guttmacher Institute
29. Health GAP (Global Access Project)
30. HealthHIV
31. HIV Medicine Association
32. Howard Brown Health
33. Human Rights Campaign
34. Human Rights First
35. Immigration Equality
36. InReach
37. interACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth
38. Interconnected Justice
39. International Center for Research on Women
40. International Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights
41. International Planned Parenthood Federation
42. International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
43. Ipas
44. JSI
45. Just Detention International
46. Koppa - The LGBTQI+ Economic Power Lab
47. Lawyers for Good Government
48. LGBT Tech
49. LGBTQ+ Victory Institute
50. Los Angeles LGBT Center

51. MADRE
52. MPact Global
53. MSI Reproductive Choices
54. NASTAD
55. National Black Justice Collective
56. National Center for Transgender Equality
57. National Coalition for LGBTQ Health
58. National Council of Jewish Women
59. National LGBT Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC)
60. National LGBTQI+ Cancer Network
61. National Organization for Women
62. National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA)
63. NMAC
64. Oasis Legal Services
65. ORAM - Organization for Refuge, Asylum and Migration
66. Outright International
67. PAI
68. Pathfinder International
69. PFLAG National
70. Planned Parenthood Federation of America
71. Population Connection Action Fund
72. Population Council
73. Population Institute
74. Population Services Institute
75. Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Public Witness
76. Prevention Access Campaign
77. Prism United
78. Rainbow Railroad
79. Reproductive Freedom for All
80. Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
81. SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change
82. Society for Humanistic Judaism
83. Synergía - Initiatives for Human Rights
84. T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
85. The Global Justice Institute
86. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center
87. The Shalom Center
88. The Trevor Project
89. The Williams Institute
90. Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund (TLDEF)
91. Treatment Action Group
92. U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus
93. Union for Reform Judaism
94. Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)

95. United Nations Association of the USA
96. USA for UNFPA
97. Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
98. Whitman-Walker Institute
99. Women of Reform Judaism
100. Women's Refugee Commission
101. Woodhull Freedom Foundation