

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2506

June 30, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio:

As people throughout the United States celebrate Pride Month, we write with deep concern regarding the rise in criminalization of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) individuals in countries across the globe. These violations of human rights endanger the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people. Criminalizing LGBTQI+ individuals undermines democracy globally, as well as U.S. national security. Thus, we urge the State Department to take adequate measures to speak out against this criminalization and protect U.S. citizens abroad, including your staff, who may be detained or harmed under such laws, policies, and practices.

Most countries, including the U.S., have ratified international treaties protecting individuals from discrimination, torture, and inhumane and degrading treatment.¹ The United Nations (UN) has interpreted these human rights laws to apply to all individuals and highlighted the detrimental effects of discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.² This led UN Member States to adopt Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, requiring all countries to take action to

¹ *Status of Ratification*, UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), <https://indicators.ohchr.org/> (62 countries have ratified 15-18 international human rights treaties; 132 other countries have ratified at least 5 treaties); *United States of American LGBTI Profile*, ILGA Database, <https://database.ilga.org/united-states-of-america-lgbti>; *A Guide to LGBTQ+ Rights in the UN and African Human Rights Systems*, Univ. of Pretoria (p. 9), https://www.chr.up.ac.za/images/researchunits/sogie/documents/A_Guide_to_LGBTIQ_Rights_in_the_UN_and_Africa_V3_27.09.2022_1.pdf; *The United Nations Speaks Out*, UN OHCHR (Apr. 2011), https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Discrimination/LGBT_discrimination.pdf.

² *LGBTIQ+ People*, UN, <https://www.un.org/en/lgbtiq-people>.

eliminate discrimination and inequality for individuals by 2030.³ Secretary Rubio, even you, as a U.S. Senator helped lead legislation to “stand against terrorism and hate” against the LGBTQ community in the wake of the Pulse Club Massacre, acknowledging the impacts global attacks have inspiring U.S. domestic attacks and vowing to “never forget.”⁴ You also called on the U.S. to use its voice to condemn Chechen government’s anti-LGBTQ+ abuses.⁵ It is incumbent upon the United States to stand in support of the human rights of LGBTQI+ individuals.

Every person deserves to live authentically, yet several countries are violating international human rights laws that protect LGBTQI+ individuals. One-third of countries around the world criminalize same-sex consensual acts between adults, and 12 countries allow LGBTQI+ people to be executed for being themselves.⁶ Ghana, for example, recently passed a law which criminalizes the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer community, requires civilians to report these individuals, and punishes anyone who identifies as an “ally.”⁷ Last year, Hungary’s parliament banned gatherings that support LGBTQI+ people and codified fines and incarceration for participants and organizers.⁸ With millions of lives in danger, urgent action is needed to protect LGBTQI+ individuals.

U.S. civilians, diplomatic personnel, military members, and nonprofit workers on the ground providing health care and disaster supports will be affected and have their safety threatened if the U.S. does not take action. Even U.S. citizens perceived as being part of the LGBTQI+ community and traveling or living in those countries may be used as bargaining chips. This is a serious U.S. national security concern and also a threat to the U.S.’s decades long efforts to promote democracy globally. There are an estimated 5.4 million Americans living abroad,⁹

³ *Goal 10: Reduce Inequality Within and Among Countries*, UN Sustainable Development Goals, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/inequality/>; *UN Secretariat Strategy on Protection from Violence and Discrimination of LGBTIQ+ Persons*, UN, <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un-secretariat-lgbtiq-strategy.pdf>; *The 17 Goals*, UN Department of Economic & Social Affairs, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

⁴ *Sens. Rick Scott and Marco Rubio Recognize 8th Anniversary of Pulse Nightclub Shooting*, Senator Rick Scott Press Release (June 12, 2024), <https://www.rickscott.senate.gov/2024/6/sens-rick-scott-and-marco-rubio-recognize-8th-anniversary-of-pulse-nightclub-shooting>; S. Res. 371 (118th) (June 12, 2024) <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-resolution/731/cosponsors?s=1&r=1&hl=Pulse>.

⁵ *Sen. Rubio Denounces Gay Chechnya Arrests on Senate Floor*, Washington Blade (Apr. 25, 2017), <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2017/04/25/rubio-denounces-gay-chechnya-arrests-senate-floor/>.

⁶ *LGBTQ+ Persecution: Cases from 15 Countries in Our Database*, Human Rights Experts (Apr. 14, 2026), <https://thehuman-rights.com/lgbtq-persecution-15-countries-database/>.

⁷ *Ghana’s Parliament Passes Anti-LGBTQ+ Bill*, BBC (May 29, 2026), <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5yedendprko>.

⁸ *Setbacks for LGBTQ+ People Around the World*, Fondation Emergence, <https://www.fondationemergence.org/en/nouvelles/setbacks-for-lgbtq-people-around-the-world>.

⁹ *How Many Americans Live Abroad?*, Association of Americans Resident Overseas (AARO) (Oct. 2024), <https://aaro.org/living-abroad/how-many-americans-live-abroad>.

and the State Department has a duty to ensure their safety. Historically, the United States has played a critical diplomatic role in promoting democracy and freedom for all individuals, including LGBTQI+ persons.¹⁰ The U.S. should be a world leader promoting human rights domestically and globally.

Given this urgent context, we request responses to the following no later than July 15:

1. Please provide a public statement reaffirming U.S. commitment to protecting the human rights of LGBTQI+ individuals.
2. Please restore the inclusion of LGBTQI+ analysis in each annual State Department report.
3. How does the State Department plan to ensure U.S. citizens and employees are protected in their travels abroad?
4. Is the State Department aware of any cases of U.S. citizens being harmed, executed, criminalized, or detained in connection to anti-LGBTQI+ laws?
5. How is the State Department planning to proactively educate LGBTQI+ Americans about the risks of traveling to these countries? What guidance exists and is shared proactively for Americans who are detained, criminalized, or facing persecution under these laws?

We appreciate your attention to this urgent matter and look forward to working together to protect human rights and strengthen American diplomacy and leadership.

Sincerely,



Ayanna Pressley

¹⁰ *Annual Progress Report*, U.S. Department of State (2024), <https://2021-2025.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2024-LGBTQI-Annual-Report.pdf>.