

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 26, 2020

Ambassador Birx:

As members of the Congressional LGBTQ+ Equality Caucus, we stand with you in your efforts to combat the unprecedented health crisis we are experiencing with the coronavirus. Based on your many years of service in the fight against HIV/AIDS, we take comfort knowing that you are in this leadership position and have been, and will continue to be, an ally to the LGBTQ community. We write today to raise some specific concerns faced by the LGBTQ community and to ask you to keep these concerns in mind as you develop and implement solutions to this crisis.

The coronavirus pandemic is an event that will massively impact the daily lives of people around the world and many will unfortunately suffer throughout this crisis. As with many other economic and health crises, we know that LGBTQ people will be impacted disproportionately. We urge you to keep the specific circumstances of this community in mind as you work on efforts to combat the coronavirus and assist those in need:

- LGBTQ people have long faced discrimination in the health care system which has negatively impacted their health outcomes and has additionally made them wary of accessing services in the first place.
- LGBTQ people have historically faced greater health challenges as a community disproportionate to the community as a whole. Higher rates of smoking, cancer and depression are just a few examples.
- In particular, the higher rate of HIV/AIDS in the LGBTQ community has had important implications when discussing health concerns that impact people with compromised immune systems. This makes them particularly vulnerable to coronavirus.
- Many elders in the LGBTQ community grew up in an era where asserting an LGBTQ identity was difficult to impossible. These individuals faced higher levels of family rejection and a loss of support networks due to the HIV/AIDS crisis. Because of this, many of them live in isolation and do not have access to supportive social services.

For every community impacted by coronavirus, you will often see ways in which the LGBTQ populations within those communities face harsh realities. Young people whose colleges are closing may not have supportive families who will take them in. LGBTQ people who lose their jobs may have a harder time finding new work based on pre-existing patterns of discrimination against LGBTQ job-seekers. Those LGBTQ people in prison or who are navigating the immigration system already face unique challenges, including vulnerability to violence, which

can be made worse during a crisis such as this. LGBTQ communities of color who identify as transgender or gender non-confirming or have disabilities, will face additional challenges, including disproportionate rates of discrimination and limited access to healthcare and basic resources.

We call on you to keep these considerations in mind as you develop solutions and we ask you to be proactive by publicly asserting that any programs or initiatives that assist the American people during this crisis must be conducted without discrimination against any community, including the LGBTQ community, and that there are no grounds by which this type of discrimination is acceptable.

We stand ready to assist you and your team as you tackle this massive crisis which is already impacting the lives of all Americans. We thank you for your past and present support of the LGBTQ community and we look forward to seeing that support continue.

Sincerely,



Deb Haaland
Vice Chair, LGBTQ Equality Caucus
Member of Congress



Sharice Davids
Co-Chair, LGBTQ Equality Caucus
Member of Congress

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