

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 9, 2025

Marco Rubio  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, Northwest  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We strongly oppose your decision to remove the subsection on Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC Subsection) from the State Department's Annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (Human Rights Reports). We urge you to restore this information, or else ensure it is integrated throughout each Human Rights Report. We are also deeply concerned about the broader rollback of the section on Discrimination and Societal Abuses which has existed for many years—including during the first Trump administration.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, we regret the State Department's considerable delay in delivering these reports to Congress and the unprecedented lack of public and press engagement in the reports' release.

For a decade and a half, the Human Rights Reports—and specifically the SOGIESC subsection of each—have been a critical source of information on human rights violations and abuses against LGBTQI+ persons around the world. This includes during the entirety of President Trump's first Administration.<sup>2</sup> For example, the 2017 Human Rights Report for Russia included details on the state-sponsored and societal violence against LGBTQI+ persons in Chechnya, including extrajudicial killings.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, violence and criminalization based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression remains widespread. More than 60 countries criminalize consensual same-sex sexual relations, and more than a dozen countries criminalize the gender expression of transgender people.<sup>4</sup> Today there are still 12 countries where someone can be executed for being LGBTQI+.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This includes the removal of sections on women and reproductive rights, indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities, among others.

<sup>2</sup> See, *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE (Mar. 2010), <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/index.htm>; See e.g., *2016 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE (Mar. 2017) <https://www.state.gov/reports/2016-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/>; *2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE (Mar. 2020) <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Russia 2017 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE (Mar. 2018) <https://www.state.gov/reports/2017-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/russia/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Legal Frameworks | Criminalisation of consensual same-sex sexual acts Hide SQ Enlarged Atlantic*, ILGA WORLD DATABASE (2025), <https://database.ilga.org/criminalisation-consensual-same-sex-sexual-acts>.

<sup>5</sup> *Map of Jurisdictions that Criminalise LGBT People*, HUMAN DIGNITY TRUST, [https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/?type\\_filter\\_submitted=&type\\_filter%5B%5D=crim\\_gender\\_exp](https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/?type_filter_submitted=&type_filter%5B%5D=crim_gender_exp).

The information in these reports is critical—not just for human rights advocates—but also for Americans travelling abroad. LGBTQI+ Americans and their families must continue to have access to comprehensive, reliable information about a country’s human rights record so they can plan travel and take appropriate precautions. Especially for Americans who may have to travel to hostile countries for work, the SOGISC subsection of the Human Rights Reports has provided a key tool to help minimize the risk of discrimination and violence.

We also know the criminalization of LGBTQI+ people often goes hand-in-hand with crackdowns on other minority groups, a rollback of civil liberties, and the general erosion of democratic principles.<sup>6</sup> This makes information about attacks on LGBTQI+ people additionally vital for understanding trends regarding the rise of authoritarianism, persecution of ethnic and religious minorities, and threats to human rights more broadly.

In addition to these very real benefits, publishing the SOGIESC subsection has reflected our country’s commitment to the core American values of freedom of assembly, expression, and association. Across both Republican and Democratic presidential administrations, the United States has maintained the inherent right of all people to live free from violence and discrimination as a central tenant of its foreign affairs. In fact, during President Trump’s first term, he launched a global effort to end the criminalization of homosexuality. He highlighted these efforts in a September 2019 speech before the United Nations General Assembly where he said, “my administration is working with other nations to stop criminalizing of homosexuality and we stand in solidarity with LGBTQI+ people who live in countries that punish, jail, or execute individuals based upon sexual orientation.”<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, as Senator you condemned the Chechen government’s brutal campaign against LGBTQI+ people.<sup>8</sup> In your words, the “United States and other responsible nations should do more to ensure that all people are protected and those who harm them are held responsible” and that “we should use our voice on the global stage to call attention to these horrifying acts and to ensure that they are condemned in an appropriate way, ultimately in the hopes that they will be stopped.”<sup>9</sup> As Secretary of State, you have an obligation ensure the United States does not retreat from these efforts.

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Andrew R. Flores, et al., *Democratic Backsliding and LGBTI Acceptance*, UCLA SCHOOL OF LAW WILLIAMS INST. (Sept. 2023), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/GAI-Democracy-Sep-2023.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Josh Lederman, *Trump administration launches global effort to end criminalization of homosexuality*, NBC NEWS, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/trump-administration-launches-global-effort-end-criminalization-homosexuality-n973081>; *Remarks by President Trump to the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly*, TRUMP WHITE HOUSE ARCHIVES (Sep. 25, 2019), <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-74th-session-united-nations-general-assembly/>.

<sup>8</sup> Chris Johnson, *Sen. Rubio denounces gay Chechnya arrests on Senate floor*, WASH. BLADE (Apr. 25, 2017), <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2017/04/25/rubio-denounces-gay-chechnya-arrests-senate-floor/>.

<sup>9</sup> *On Senate floor, Rubio highlights human rights abuses against LGBT community in Chechnya*, Senator Marco Rubio YouTube Channel (Apr. 24, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8dV8MtqpV4>.

We again urge you to restore the SOGIESC Subsection to every country's Human Rights Report, or alternatively, integrate the information from this subsection throughout each Human Rights Report.

Sincerely,



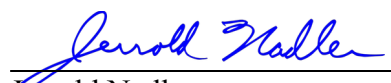
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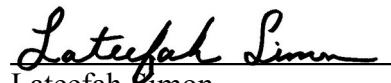
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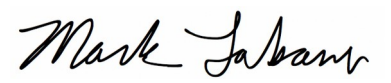
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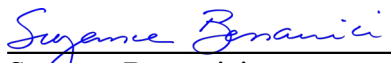
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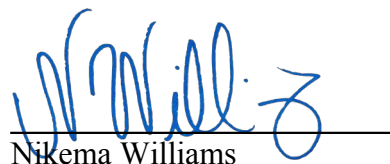



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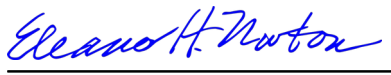
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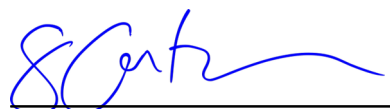
  
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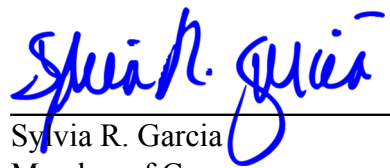
  
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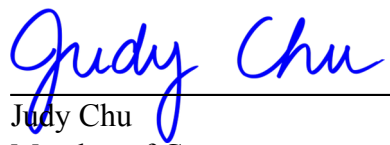
  
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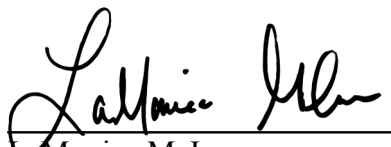
  
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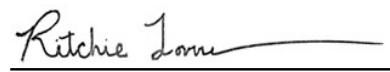
  
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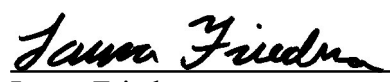
  
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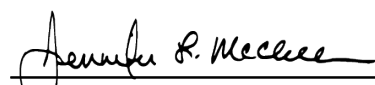
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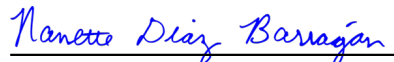
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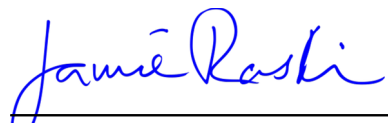
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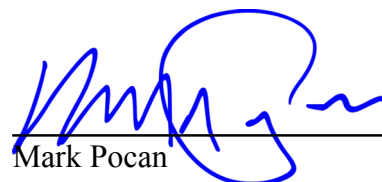
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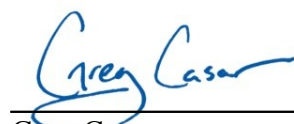
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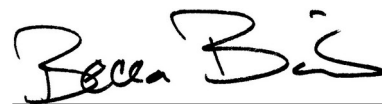
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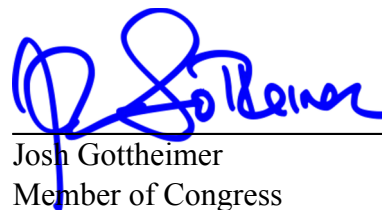
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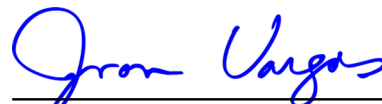
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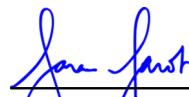
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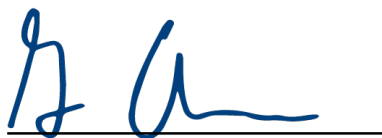
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