

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 27, 2016

His Excellency Valeriy Chaly
The Ambassador of Ukraine
3350 M Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007

Dear Ambassador Chaly,

We write today to express our strong support for actions to strengthen protections of the LGBT community in Ukraine. Our experience in the United States reminds us that equality for marginalized communities, such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community can be a slow process but we believe that Ukraine is moving in the right direction on these matters. As parliamentarians, we understand the complex process of making forward progress on these issues, and one important way in which progress can be measured is how governments, both national and local, respond to peaceful LGBT community gatherings such as Pride marches and similar events.

Specifically, we were alarmed at the recent events surrounding the Equality Festival in Lviv, including threats and acts of violence. We believe that governments, including local governments, must do more to ensure a safe environment for all segments of the community and to allow for peaceful gatherings such as this Festival. We ask that the Ukrainian Government call on the criminal justice system to bring those responsible to justice and support upcoming Pride events, thus ensuring the full exercise of the rights of members of vulnerable groups and the overall advancement of human rights in Ukraine.

The Equality Festival in Lviv aimed to promote tolerance, equality, and nondiscrimination of various social groups, including the LGBT community. In the week prior to the event, festival organizers reported threats toward the festival participants and faced obstacles to securing a venue. On the eve of the festival, a local court banned all public events from March 19-21. Despite the obstacles and threats, activists pressed on, but were ultimately forced to cancel after a bomb threat at the hotel. Ukrainian human rights activists reported that at least two festival guests were severely beaten by a group of young men, while many others experienced threats and intimidation by groups of masked protesters.

We are particularly concerned at the lack of forceful government condemnation of such violence and the overall inaction of authorities in the face of threats and violence against the festival and

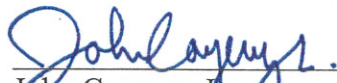
its participants. Activists reported alarming statements by clergy and members of local city and regional councils, who called on individuals to “fight back” against the Equality Festival. A police leader reportedly accused the festival organizers of being “provocateurs” when he arrived at the site. While police worked to successfully evacuate participants from the hotel, they did not arrest any of the violent protesters. After the event, police escorted festival participants to the station, but directed them to leave after an hour. Activists reported that police told them that armed individuals were looking for them, but took no action to further protect participants or arrest the assailants.

This violence unfortunately casts a shadow over recent progress to advance the human rights of vulnerable groups in Ukraine, including LGBT people. The Ukrainian Parliament’s recent leadership in advancing workplace nondiscrimination protections inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity is an important step toward ending discrimination. In another recent example of leadership, police forces suffered casualties when they bravely protected participants in Kyiv’s 2015 LGBT Pride, after ultranationalist group Right Sector assaulted marchers. Prominent leaders—including President Poroshenko—expressed their support for marchers. In addition, we were heartened by the news that a more recent Equality Festival in mid-May in Kyiv, was handled quite differently, with the city government coming out in support of the festival and saying “there is no place for any kind of discrimination in a developed democratic society.”

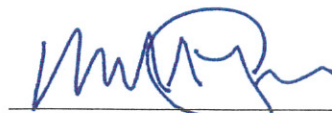
Brave activists are continuing efforts to promote the concerns of the LGBT community and to create a space to celebrate their progress. The Ukrainian Government must stand with them and support their rights to free expression and physical safety. We urge you to pass on our message to your government to call on law enforcement to engage with Pride organizers to map out plans for a safe event and to remove any barriers that stand in the way.

We look forward to continuing to engage with you and your government in partnership as you address pressing human rights issues.


Sincerely,




John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal

Alan S. Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Jim McDermott

Jim McDermott
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Grace Meng

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Derek Kilmer

Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress

Mark Takano

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Eleanor H. Norton

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Janice D. Schakowsky

Janice D. Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Ted Lieu

Ted Lieu
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Daniel T. Kildee

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Adam Smith

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

William R. Keating

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Member of Congress

Kyrsten Sinema

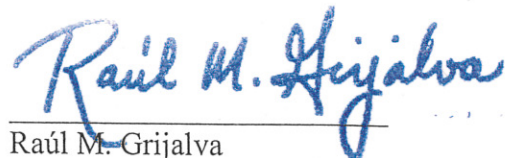
Kyrsten Sinema
Member of Congress

Brian Higgins

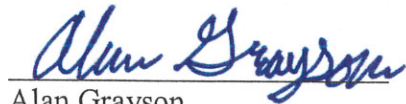
Brian Higgins
Member of Congress



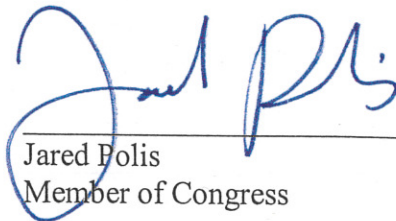
Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



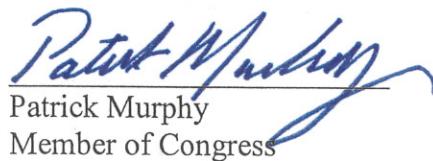
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



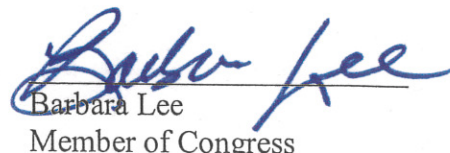
Alan Grayson
Member of Congress



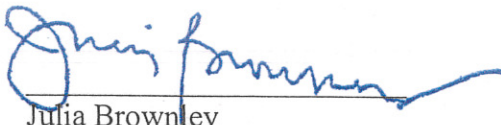
Jared Polis
Member of Congress



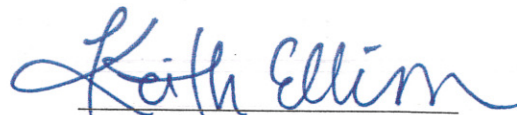
Patrick Murphy
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



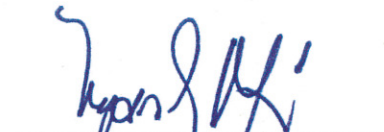
Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



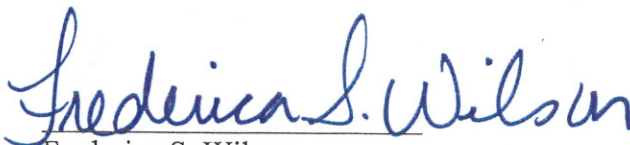
Keith Ellison
Member of Congress



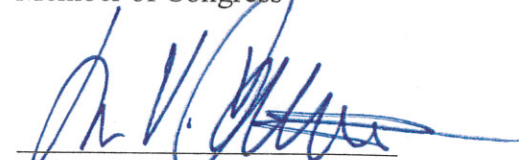
Richard L. Hanna
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress



Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress



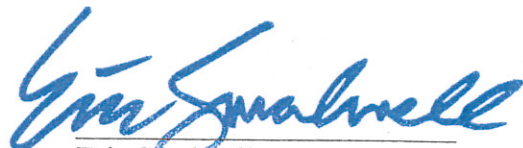
Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



Theodore E. Deutch
Member of Congress



Loretta Sanchez
Member of Congress



Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress

Lois Frankel

Lois Frankel
Member of Congress

Norma J. Torres

Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress