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ASSISTANT DEMOCRATIC WHIP

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2109

August 8, 2013

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The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520-0099

Dear Secretary Kerry:

As 88 of my colleagues in the House expressed to you last week, I too am extremely concerned with the recent actions of the Russian Parliament that prohibit the “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations.” This legislation directly threatens the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community and is antithetical to the values of the United States that every person, regardless of their race, sexual orientation, or creed, should be treated equally. As the 2014 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games will be held in Sochi, Russia, I join my colleagues in requesting information about “what diplomatic measures the State Department is planning to take to ensure that LGBT athletes, staff and spectators, and their supporters, are not arrested, detained or otherwise penalized during the Sochi Games.”

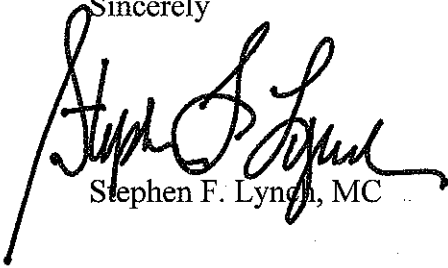
As the Boston Globe mentioned yesterday regarding the Russian policy, anyone promoting gay “propaganda” around minors can be put in jail and fined, and foreigners can be deported. In addition, this law is so broadly written that the simple act of hand-holding by same-sex couples is also punishable. This legislation could potentially endanger LGBT Olympians not only from Russia, but also from the US and around the world. The Olympic Games are meant to be a celebration of the athletes and we should be focused on their performances, not their sexual orientation. Unfortunately, this type of discrimination against the LGBT community has become a pattern in Russia, with the aforementioned law being only the most recent example. Within the past year, Russia has also passed a law banning the adoption of Russian-born children by gay couples, as well as any couple or single parent who resides in a country that recognizes marriage equality. This type of discrimination cannot and should not be tolerated.

According to CNN, Russian politician Igor Anaskikh, who is the Deputy Chairman of the Parliament's Physical Culture, Sport and Youth Policy Committee, said, “The Olympic Games is a major international event. We need to be as polite and tolerant as possible. That is why a decision has been made not to raise this issue during the Olympics.” Even if this is the case, we cannot condone the actions of the Russian government. I do not believe that there is any place in today's society for government-sanctioned discrimination and prejudice against any one

particular group. This is a principle that every nation should abide by and I urge you to take these concerns directly to the Russian government.

With the Sochi Games six months away, the urgency of this matter should not be understated. I respectfully urge that you take steps to ensure all athletes and individuals associated with the 2014 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games will be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve, especially those who identify as LGBT. I look forward to hearing back from you and pledge whatever assistance I can in working towards this important goal.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen F. Lynch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Stephen F. Lynch, MC