

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 27, 2015

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

As you know, the United States Supreme Court recently held that the Constitution protects the right of same sex couples to marry. As the United States continues to make progress toward equality for our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, many countries around the world have yet to address their own discriminatory practices. As such, we are writing to express our concerns about recent reports that American LGBT Foreign Service Officers (FSO)s are sometimes denied an equal opportunity to represent the United States abroad because certain foreign governments refuse to recognize their same-sex marriages. As Members of Congress, we believe that when same-sex couples working for the State Department receive equal treatment at home and abroad, our diplomatic corps truly reflects the American ideals of openness, equality, and human rights.

In particular, we are deeply concerned about reports that LGBT FSOs are sometimes denied an equal opportunity to represent the United States abroad because certain foreign governments refuse to accredit same-sex spouses. We also understand that the State Department sometimes declines or discourages LGBT FSOs from assignments to certain overseas posts due to anticipated objections from the host nation, and that some State Department employees have apparently been denied assistance when they try to bring their same-sex spouses into countries that do not recognize their marriages.

These decisions can hamper the professional growth of those FSOs, and threaten the Department's ability to ensure that it can place the best, most qualified person in each position. We urge the State Department to prioritize this issue by advocating for all American Foreign Service spouses, regardless of sexual orientation.

We cannot look the other way when an American diplomatic spouse – any American diplomatic spouse – is discriminated against in this way. If a foreign government refuses to issue the appropriate visa to same-sex spouses, we ask that the State Department reciprocate by denying a visa to the spouse of a diplomat from that country.

In countries that maintain legalized forms of racism, sexism, or other types of bias, we believe the State Department should take a proactive role in demonstrating America's deep commitment to equality, dignity, and diversity. The Supreme Court's decision in *United States v. Windsor* affirmed that commitment, stating that the federal government has a Constitutional obligation to treat all spouses equally regardless of sexual orientation. The June 26 decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, further demonstrated the Court's commitment to marriage equality. While we understand the challenge in dealing with foreign governments that discriminate, we call on the State Department to send a forceful message that all American families must be treated equally.

Thank you very much for your attention to this important matter.

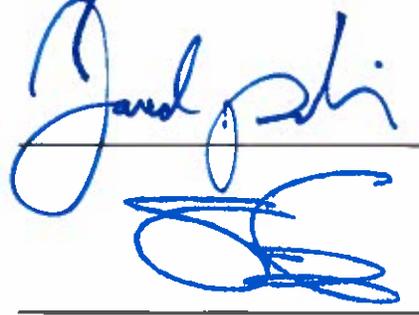
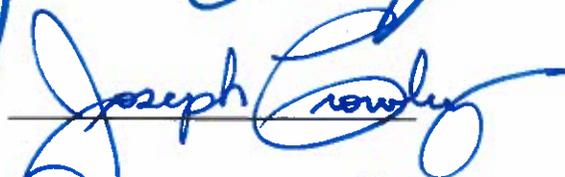
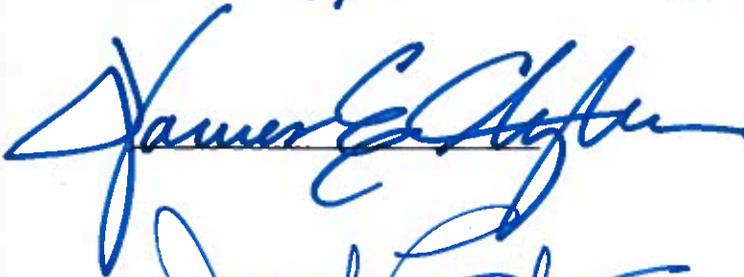
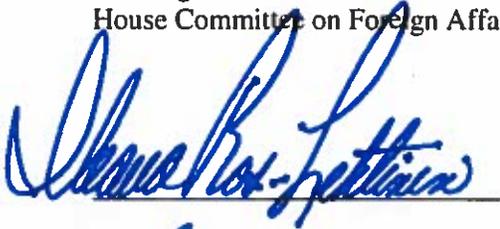
Sincerely,



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NITA M. LOWEY
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