

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 7, 2017

The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Sessions:

During the campaign, President Trump said that he would “do everything in [his] power to protect LGBTQ citizens.”¹ We write to you because the Administration is not living up to the President’s promise and continues to take actions to reduce data collection about the well-being of, and rollback protections for, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals. We urge you to reverse course on actions that will make it more challenging for programs you oversee to serve LGBTQ Americans.

Starting this year, two federal grant programs designed to serve homeless youth and children who are the victims of commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking will no longer specifically focus on the needs of LGBTQ youth. While previous funding announcements for the U.S. Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Mentoring for Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Domestic Sex Trafficking Initiative and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Street Outreach Program specifically stated that grantees were required to address the unique needs of LGBTQ youth,² this year’s announcements removed that requirement as well all mentions of LGBTQ youth.³ As LGBTQ youth are at a higher risk for running away and becoming homeless compared to their peers, and therefore more likely to be victimized, we are concerned about the effect these Administration decisions would have on these vulnerable youth.

DOJ’s Mentoring for Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Domestic Sex Trafficking Initiative, administered by DOJ’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, supports the capacity of organizations to respond to the needs of child victims of commercial sex exploitation and domestic sex trafficking, including identifying and enrolling

¹ Donald Trump Address at the Republican National Convention (July 21, 2016) (available at <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4612805/donald-trump-addresses-republican-national-convention>).

² See OJJDP FY 2016 Mentoring for Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Domestic Sex Trafficking Initiative Funding Opportunity Announcement (OJJDP-2016-9143) (available at <https://www.ojjdp.gov/grants/solicitations/FY2016/MentoringCSEDST.pdf>); Street Outreach Program Funding Opportunity Announcement (HHS-2016-ACF-ACYF-YO-1124) (available at https://ami.grantsolutions.gov/files/HHS-2016-ACF-ACYF-YO-1124_0.pdf).

³ See OJJDP FY 2017 Mentoring for Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Domestic Sex Trafficking Initiative Funding Opportunity Announcement (OJJDP-2017-10985) (available at <https://www.ojjdp.gov/grants/solicitations/FY2017/CVCSSEDSMent.pdf>); Street Outreach Program Funding Opportunity Announcement (HHS-2017-ACF-ACYF-YO-1241) (available at https://ami.grantsolutions.gov/files/HHS-2017-ACF-ACYF-YO-1241_0.pdf).

youth who are in need of services and providing those services. DOJ's decision to eliminate LGBTQ youth as a focus of the program runs counter to its own findings and could have serious repercussions on the lives of LGBTQ youth.

A 2013 study by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council, sponsored by DOJ, found that homelessness is the largest risk factor for commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking among minors.⁴ Furthermore, the study found that being LGBT increases vulnerability to commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking.⁵ In 2009, the National Coalition for the Homeless reported that 58.7 percent of homeless LGBT youth are exploited through sexual prostitution compared to 33.4 percent of heterosexual homeless youth.⁶ In the 2013 study commissioned by DOJ, the Committee on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking Minors in the United States found that while LGBT youth face a disproportionate share of both homelessness and commercial sexual exploitation, LGBT youth are often overlooked as a population at risk for commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking.⁷ The Committee concluded that more needed to be known about the prevalence of these crimes among, and the associated needs of, certain vulnerable and difficult-to-reach populations, including LGBT youth.⁸ With the unique and distinct challenges facing LGBT victims of commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking,⁹ as well as the lack of reporting, it is unclear why DOJ made the decision to no longer focus on the needs of LGBTQ youth through the Mentoring for Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Domestic Sex Trafficking Initiative.

While DOJ was making the decision to eliminate LGBTQ youth as a focus of its Mentoring for Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Domestic Sex Trafficking Initiative, HHS made a similar decision when it decided to eliminate LGBTQ youth as a focus of the Street Outreach Program. The Street Outreach Program supports organizations around the country that work with homeless, runaway, and street youth to help them find stable housing and services. The program's ultimate goal is to prevent the sexual abuse or exploitation of young people living on the streets or in unstable housing and prepare them for independence. Taken together, the decision by DOJ and HHS to eliminate addressing the unique needs of LGBTQ youth through these programs further imperils already vulnerable youth.

⁴ *Confronting Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States*, Institute of Medicine and National Research Council (2013) (available at <https://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/243838.pdf>).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *LGBT Homeless*, National Coalition for the Homeless (June 2009) (available at <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/lgbtq.html>).

⁷ *Confronting Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States*, Institute of Medicine and National Research Council (2013) (available at <https://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/243838.pdf>).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Sex Trafficking of LGBT Individuals: A Call for Service Provision, Research and Action*, Omar Martinez and Guadalupe Kelle (2013) (available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4204396/pdf/nihms567983.pdf>).

In order to ensure that key programs meet the needs of the LGBTQ population, we urge you to continue to emphasize that LGBTQ youth are a primary focus of the Mentoring for Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Domestic Sex Trafficking Initiative. We also request a staff briefing on the decision to eliminate mention of LGBTQ youth in this year's funding announcement and how DOJ plans to ensure that the needs of LGBTQ youth are being met through this program.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

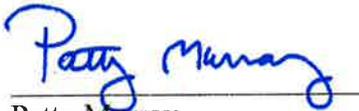
Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



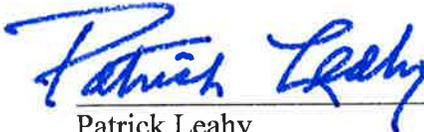
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



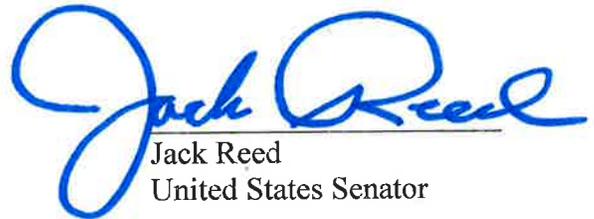
Patty Murray
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



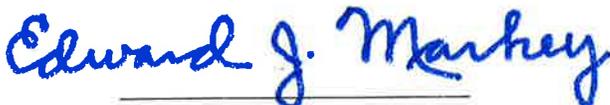
Jack Reed
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



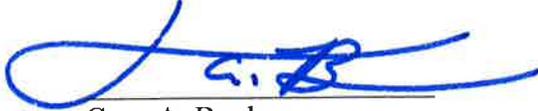
Al Franken
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



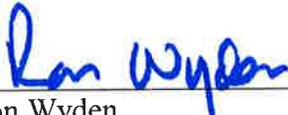
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



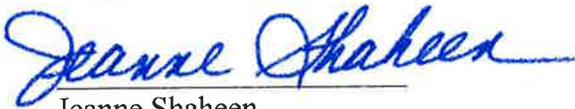
Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator