

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 24, 2021

Acting Administrator Gloria D. Steele  
United States Agency for International Development  
Ronald Reagan Building  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Acting Administrator Steele:

As part of the American Rescue Plan, USAID will be receiving approximately \$10 billion to help the world cope with the devastation brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. We write to you to request that particular attention be paid in your deployment of these additional funds to reach the most vulnerable populations. From the devastating experience of the first year of this pandemic, we know that traditionally marginalized communities including LGBTQI+, people with disabilities, and racial minorities are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the inequalities and vulnerabilities that LGBTQI+ people in particular face worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Amidst ongoing lockdowns, many LGBTQI+ people have lost their livelihoods, are at increased risk for gender-based violence, food insecurity, and homelessness, and face even greater barriers to services, including access to sexual and reproductive health care. In some countries, those in the LGBTQI+ community have been scapegoated and falsely charged for spreading COVID-19, while other governments have used COVID-19 lock down measures as an excuse to violate the human rights of LGBTQI+ people and other vulnerable groups. LGBTQI+ people have also been excluded from many relief efforts due to binary gendered approaches to distribution, as well as a reliance on unsafe spaces for LGBTQI+ people, non-inclusive definitions of “family,” and discrimination by relief workers.<sup>2</sup>

The challenges of COVID-19 have only increased the demand for funding by LGBTQI+ organizations, which have long been underfunded.<sup>3</sup> In April of 2020, Outright International launched its COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund, the largest global COVID-19 response fund for LGBTQI+ communities in the world. In the first three months of the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://outrightinternational.org/content/vulnerability-amplified-impact-covid-19-pandemic-lgbtq-people>

<sup>2</sup> [https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/7x9.75\\_BriefingPaperNov2020WDonors.pdf](https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/7x9.75_BriefingPaperNov2020WDonors.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Prior to COVID-19, donor governments spend on average only \$0.04 out of every \$100 in international assistance on LGBTQI+ rights. <https://globalresourcesreport.org/>

pandemic, the fund received nearly 1,500 applications from communities in need totaling approximately \$12 million in funding requests.<sup>4</sup> The majority of applications focused on alleviating hunger within LGBTQI+ communities, with additional activities focused on health care and organizational survival. Despite strong fundraising efforts, Outright International was only able to fulfill 6.6% of the requests – or roughly \$1 million – due to the substantial needs of LGBTQI+ organizations. Outright International’s fund demonstrates not only the significant need and demand for LGBTQI+ funding, but also the importance of inclusive humanitarian and disaster relief efforts for those in the LGBTQI+ community. As COVID-19 has demonstrated, current structures and systems of relief have allowed LGBTQI+ people to fall through the cracks, and it is only with long-term, comprehensive, sustainable measures that those in the LGBTQI+ community will not face disproportionate impacts in the face of disaster and crisis. Unfortunately, of all the supplemental COVID-19 relief funding administered by USAID, zero was allocated for LGBTQI+ organizations or populations.

As you know, on February 4, President Biden signed the *Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Persons Around the World*, directing all agencies engaged abroad to ensure that U.S. diplomacy and foreign assistance promote and protect the human rights of LGBTQI+ people. The Memorandum states specifically that “Agencies involved with foreign aid, assistance, and development programs should consider the impact of programs funded by the Federal Government on human rights, including the rights of LGBTQI+ persons, when making funding decisions, as appropriate and consistent with applicable law.” The deployment of the American Rescue Plan funding is one such opportunity.

We ask that USAID’s COVID Relief Task Force be directed to pay particular attention to these vulnerable communities and that you ensure funding is directed to address the particular needs of these populations.

Sincerely Yours,



David N. Cicilline  
Member of Congress



Joaquin Castro  
Chairman, Subcommittee on International Development, International Organizations, and Global Corporate Social Impact  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs



Dina Titus  
Member of Congress

<sup>4</sup> [https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/7x9.75\\_BriefingPaperNov2020WDonors.pdf](https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/7x9.75_BriefingPaperNov2020WDonors.pdf)