



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN

February 1, 2007

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) rights organization, and its 600,000 members, we wish to highlight our legislative priorities for the 110th Congress. HRC's mission is to ensure that members of the GLBT community are guaranteed equal rights and can be open, honest and safe at home, at work and in the community. We work to ensure equity in the workplace, provide security to GLBT families, ensure our community is safe and healthy and ensure our nation's leaders are fair-minded. The legislation outlined below will help HRC achieve these key goals:

1. Employment Nondiscrimination Act

HRC firmly believes that no American should be fired or refused a job because of his or her sexual orientation or gender identity. HRC urges the House of Representatives to pass legislation that would ban employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. This legislation remains the top priority for HRC.

2. Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act

HRC asks Members of Congress to support the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which passed the House in September 2005 by an overwhelming bipartisan vote. The legislation would give law enforcement the tools they need to investigate and prosecute violent hate crimes against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Americans.

3. Military Readiness Enhancement Act

Enforcement of the discriminatory "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" military policy results in the discharge of GLBT members of the armed services if they are open about their sexual orientation. The General Accounting Office reports that nearly 800 specialists with critical skills have been fired, including 300 linguists, 54 of whom specialized in Arabic. In addition, the aggressive enforcement of this discriminatory policy costs taxpayers at least \$191 million. HRC is committed to working with the House of Representatives to reintroduce this bill so the military can focus on its missions and not the termination of skilled soldiers. HRC requests that the House hold hearings to evaluate the impact of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" on our nation's military readiness.

4. Domestic Partner Health Benefits Equity Act

Over 53% of the Fortune 500 companies offer domestic partner benefits, and that number is growing quickly. Currently, gay and lesbian employees who receive employer-provided health benefits for their partners face an undue tax burden, and so do the employers that provide those benefits. Married employees do not pay taxes on their employers' contribution to health care benefits, but gay and lesbian employees do. Those who cannot afford the extra taxes are often forced to do without health coverage for their loved ones. In addition, because employers must pay payroll taxes on their employees' taxable incomes, employers who provide these benefits are taxed at a higher rate as well. HRC supports legislation that would remedy this tax inequity.

5. Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act

HRC asks the House to reintroduce legislation that would provide benefits to the domestic partners of federal employees equal to those of spouses of federal employees. Fifty-three percent of Fortune 500 companies provide these benefits to their employees. It is time for the federal government to catch up with the private sector.

6. Early Treatment for HIV Act (ETHA)

Currently, childless adults living with HIV generally only qualify for Medicaid coverage once they progress to full-blown AIDS. Thus, many Americans with HIV lack the ability to receive medical care and medicine to help slow the progression of HIV disease and to prevent the onset of opportunistic infections. ETHA could help thousands of HIV-positive individuals gain early access to treatment to help them live longer, happier, and more productive lives. In the 110th Congress, HRC will work to have the House of Representatives introduce a companion version of the bill.

7. Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act

HRC supports funding for comprehensive sex education classes in our nation's schools. Currently, the only funding stream for sex education in our nation's schools requires abstinence-only until marriage instruction. A study requested by Congressman Waxman (D-CA) has shown that many of these programs contain gross medical inaccuracies. The REAL Act would create a federal grant to channel money to states that chose to teach comprehensive sex education classes. These programs would provide students with critical information about the health benefits of contraception for preventing sexually transmitted diseases including HIV. They would also provide GLBT youth with information and support specific to their needs, which are ignored by abstinence-only programs.

8. Uniting American Families Act

Formerly known as the Permanent Partners Immigration Act, the Uniting American Families Act would permit Americans to support their same-sex partner for permanent citizenship. Currently, bi-national same-sex couples must either live apart or in constant fear that one partner will be deported. This act would add the term "permanent partner" wherever the word "spouse" is now found in the immigration statutes. Under this law, permanent partners would also be subject to the same penalties for fraud as spouses. The United States would join 17 countries around the world that already recognize the importance of family unification by including same-sex partners in their immigration laws. HRC will work with Congressional allies to reintroduce this legislation in the House and Senate in the 110th Congress.

9. Family & Medical Leave Inclusion Act

HRC supports the expansion of the Family and Medical Leave Act to cover GLBT employees who need to care for domestic partners or same-sex married partners. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was passed in 1993 and allows most Americans to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave from work to recover from an illness, care for a newborn, or nurse an ill family member. HRC will work to have this key legislation reintroduced in the 110th Congress.

10. Annual Budget and Appropriations

HRC is deeply concerned about years of flat-funding for the Ryan White CARE Act and other federally funded HIV/AIDS programs including the Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA) program, prevention efforts at the Centers for Disease Control, and the Office of AIDS Research at the National Institutes of Health. HIV/AIDS remains a national crisis, particularly among gay and bisexual men and communities of color. We must make combating HIV/AIDS a priority by harnessing all possible

resources to prevent new infections, provide meaningful access to quality care and treatment, boost research to find a cure, and address the global crisis.

We look forward to continuing a relationship with you and your staff. Please feel free to contact me at (202) 216-1515 or anyone on HRC's legislative team if you have any questions regarding these bills. We anticipate that the 110th Congress will be productive for the GLBT community.

Best,



Allison Herwitt
Legislative Director

WORKING FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER EQUAL RIGHTS

1640 RHODE ISLAND AVE., NW WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036
PHONE (202) 628 4160 FAX (202) 347 5323 E-MAIL HRC@HRC.ORG