

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 12, 2018

The Honorable Donald Trump
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump,

We write to you to express serious concerns about the removal of critical LGBT health and scientific information from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Women's Health (OWH) website, and the removal of LGBT population-based data reports from the Federal Committee of Statistical Methodology (FCSM), from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) website. We are troubled by these recent actions, which, coupled with other actions your Administration has taken to restrict information for LGBT people, reveal a pattern of censorship that fosters discrimination and undermines access to evidence-based health care resources that aid millions across the country.

According to recent reports, content on the OWH website, aimed at improving health for lesbian and bisexual women, was moved, rendered inaccessible and unnavigable, or entirely deleted from the website. This includes an entire webpage devoted to important health information for lesbian and bisexual women that provided specific information on related health risks such as heart disease and breast cancer, links to pages with contact information for other federal offices and non-profit organizations with relevant health resources, and other disease-related fact sheets.¹ Such actions are especially concerning, as OWH is one of the most highly-trafficked HHS sites and serves as a vital public health resource for all women. In addition, we were alarmed to discover that sexual orientation and gender identity data collection resources and reports, which are necessary to understand the health disparities and the economic and demographic characteristics of the LGBT community, were removed from the FCSM website.²

These actions could seriously compromise the health of LGBT individuals, who have less access to health care than the general population³ and suffer disproportionately from a wide range of health conditions and disparities due to societal stigma and discrimination.⁴ Furthermore, we currently lack

¹ Rinberg, T. (2018). Removal of webpage and corresponding links pertaining to lesbian and bisexual health from HHS's Office of Women's Health website. Sunlight Foundation's Web Integrity Project. Access Report March 18, 2018. Retrieved March 27, 2018 at <http://sunlightfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/AAR-3-OWH-Lesbian-Bisexual-180321.pdf>

² Bergman, R., and Rinberg, T. (2018). In website reshuffle federal committee makes reports on collecting sexual orientation and gender identity data inaccessible. Sunlight Foundation. Retrieved March 27, 2018 at <https://sunlightfoundation.com/2018/03/02/federal-committee-makes-reports-on-collecting-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-data-inaccessible/>

³ Hseih, N., and Ruther, M. (2017). Despite increased insurance coverage, nonwhite sexual minorities still experience disparities in access to care. *Health Affairs*, 36(10). DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2017.0455>. Accessed online March 22, 2018, at <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/abs/10.1377/hlthaff.2017.0455?journalCode=hlthaff>

⁴ Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health*. Healthy People 2020. Accessed online March 22, 2018, at <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-health>

robust population-based data on the LGBT community, which inhibits the creation of sound public policy as well as the delivery of effective services to diverse communities. According to findings published in a 2011 report by the Institute of Medicine, our incomplete understanding of LGBT health disparities makes improved health for sexual and gender minority populations dependent, in part, on increasing their participation in research, addressing methodological research challenges, and further developing appropriate measures for reporting health information about LGBT people. Your Administration's decision to remove critical data and robust and accessible online public health resources for LGBT individuals represents a dangerous move backward.

Despite claims from Administration officials that this online information is integrated elsewhere, being updated, or temporarily down for maintenance, we remain seriously concerned with your Administration's pattern of scientific censorship and urge you to immediately restore these LGBT health resources. Complete, accurate, and evidence-based health information and research resources are essential to improving the health and well-being of LGBT people. While we have seen previous Administrations undermine LGBT health due to ideological pressure from conservative organizations by abruptly deleting online health information – similarly under the guise of site maintenance – your Administration has taken numerous extreme actions to systematically deny access to vital health resources for vulnerable populations, turning back the clock on equal access to care. Our federal agencies and departments should be providing timely, scientific, and updated health information, independent from ideological influence.

Your Administration's continued actions to restrict health information for vulnerable populations undermine the health and well-being of patients and families and jeopardize the integrity of our federal programs. To help us better understand these disturbing developments, please respond to the following questions by April 30, 2018:

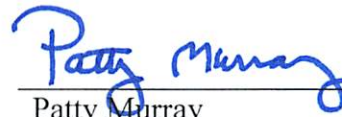
1. Why did HHS elect to remove or change the LGBT resources on the OWH website? Why did these changes occur without providing any notice or explanation to site users or the public?
2. What plans do you have to communicate these changes to site users and the public?
3. Were these actions taken in consultation with HHS stakeholders and partners? If so, with whom, and what feedback did they provide?
4. It was reported by HHS that the OWH pages were removed as part of a routine update. However, existing health topic pages do not appear to be updated, and the missing content has not been integrated into other areas of the site, as reported by an HHS spokesperson. What efforts are being made to update the materials, and on what date will this information in its entirety be available again on the OWH website?
5. Why were policy papers and reports on sexual orientation and gender identity data collection efforts removed or rendered inaccessible from the FCSM website? What federal departments were involved in making this decision?
6. Why was the FCSM website relocated from the OMB website to the National Center for Education Statistics within the Department of Education website?
7. Will the information on sexual orientation and gender identity data collection from the former FCSM site be made available on the new website within the National Center for Education Statistics? If so, when?

You have repeatedly broken your campaign promises to support and protect the LGBT community, and this latest assault on a vulnerable population could further compromise the health of more than ten million LGBT people. We are concerned that you are putting politics ahead of science and access to evidence-based health care that is critical for millions, and so we call on you to reverse course to ensure that our federal programs serve the needs of all people. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



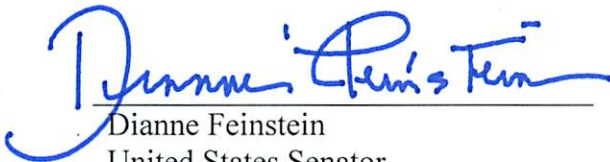
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United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
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United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
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Richard Blumenthal
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