## Second Open Letter About COVID-19 and LGBTQ+ Communities

As we move further into population level interventions and continue to grapple with care shortages and economic harms as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the undersigned LGBTQ+ and allied organizations call upon public health authorities, health care institutions, government agencies and policymakers to address the following concerns:

Ensuring Nondiscrimination in Health Care Settings. There is a long history of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in the health care system. Even where they do not encounter overt discrimination, too many LGBTQ+ individuals and families experience a lack of understanding, unwelcoming attitudes, and even hostility from health care providers and staff. In high-stress situations with looming threats of shortages of life-saving medical equipment, hospital beds and health care staff, the danger of implicit if not explicit bias against queer patients is especially worrisome. Community concerns have been heightened by recent reports that an evangelical organization which New York City is depending on to help address the COVID crisis there, is requiring volunteers to subscribe to its explicitly anti-LGBTQ "statement of faith." In addition to the very real possibility of mistreatment, the fear of encountering discrimination or hostility discourages many LGBTQ+ people from promptly seeking medical care² – which endangers them, their families and friends, and the entire community during this pandemic.

Documenting and Reporting the Impact of COVID on LGBTQ+ Communities. One of the greatest challenges facing the LGBTQ+ communities is invisibility to policymakers, public health officials and health care providers due in significant part to the failure to collect data on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) from patients and in government-sponsored surveys. Available reporting suggests that most jurisdictions are not collecting such data from patients and in COVID-19 prevention efforts.<sup>3</sup> This failure makes it much more difficult to ensure that communities that are marginalized by health care systems are fully served and protected. The disproportionate rates of infection and death related to COVID-19 among Black and Latinx populations<sup>4</sup> demonstrate the urgency of removing systematic barriers to good health and economic stability among stigmatized groups.

Protecting the Economic Health of LGBTQ+ People. The pandemic is having a grossly disproportionate, devastating effect on lower-income people and people working in service industries, many of whom are losing their jobs, their health insurance, and their means of support. Notwithstanding stereotypes to the contrary, LGBTQ+ people are disproportionately low-income. Studies have documented that on the national level 22% of our community members live in poverty, as compared to 16% of non-LGBTQ people. For some subsets of our community, this gap is even more profound; nearly one in three (29.4%) transgender people and cisgender bisexual women live in poverty. The economic toll of necessary social distancing measures, and business shutdowns, therefore, are harming our communities as well as many others.

Therefore, we call on federal, state and local public health authorities, health care institutions, and government officials to:

- Take a clear, strong, and public stand against any discrimination in this pandemic, whether based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, religion, or disability. This includes adding language prohibiting discrimination on all COVID-19 response legislation. It is particularly important to include explicit safeguards to prevent discrimination against residents of long-term care facilities, residential treatment facilities, halfway houses, youth in foster care systems, and other particularly vulnerable persons.
- Reach out to national, state and local LGBTQ+ organizations in order to listen to community concerns and to clearly convey the commitment to nondiscriminatory, culturally competent, and welcoming care for all.
- Ensure all COVID-19 data collection and reporting include SOGI demographic measures.
- Ensure government aid programs respond to the disproportionately distributed economic harms resulting from this pandemic and protect against discrimination on any of the factors noted above. There is an urgent and growing need for expanded income, medical benefits, housing and nutrition assistance for unemployed people and those whose wages have been suspended; job protection; inclusive paid sick leave and family leave; protections against evictions and utility cutoffs; and government-mandated safety precautions for health care workers, employees at grocery stores, delivery workers, sanitation workers, and others who are less able to protect themselves through social distancing.

As national, state, and local LGBTQ and allied organizations, we will continue to share important public health information to our populations and recommit to ensuring that racial equity and economic justice are leading values in our collective response to this pandemic.

## **Original Signers:**

Whitman-Walker Health
National LGBT Cancer Network
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance
New York Transgender Advocacy Group
SAGE

**Additional Signers:** FORGE, Inc.

1Hood Freedom for All Americans

Alder Health Services Freedom Oklahoma

Alliance For Full Acceptance GALAEI

Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights Garden State Equality

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Gay City: Seattle's LGBTQ Center

Forum Georgia Equality Athlete Allv Georgia Equality

Atlanta Pride Committee **GLAAD** Bisexual Organizing Project - BOP GLBT Alliance

Black and Pink, Inc. GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)

**Boston Pride Committee** Global Healthy Living Foundation/

Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center CreakyJoints Cal Voices

Hetrick-Martin Institute California LGBTQ Health and Human **Hispanic Federation** 

Services Network **HIV Medicine Association** Callen-Lorde Community Health Center **Horizons Foundation** 

Capital Pride Alliance **Howard Brown Health** Center on Halsted **Hudson Pride Center** 

CenterLink **Hugh Lane Wellness Foundation** Chicago House and Social Services Agency **Human Rights Campaign** 

Indy Pride, Inc.

Civil Liberties & Public Policy

Compass LGBTQ Community Center Inside Out Youth Services

**Counter Narrative Project** InterPride CrescentCare Justice in Aging

**CRUX Climbing** JustUs Health

DBGM, Inc. **Keystone Business Alliance Desert AIDS Project** Lambda Legal

Desi Q Diaspora Ilc Lansing Association for Human Rights

Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund Legacy Community Health

Legal Aid at Work

Disciples LGBTQ+ Alliance - AllianceQ Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgender

Dreams of Hope Physician Assistant (PA) Caucus **Equality California Lexington Fairness** LGBT Center of Central PA **Equality Federation Equality Florida LGBT Center of Greater Reading** 

**Equality North Carolina** LGBT Center of Raleigh

**Erie Gay News** LGBTQ Center OC

Evaluation, Data Integration, and Technical LGBTQ Community Center of Southern Assistance (EDIT) Research Program at Nevada

Northwestern University LGBTQIA+ Advisory Council of Pittsburgh

Family Equality Mass Equality

Fenway Health Mazzoni Center

Fierce Pride Methodist Federation For Social Action Michigan Organization on Adolescent

Sexual Health (MOASH)
MKE LGBT Community Center
Movement Advancement Project

**NAACP** 

National Association of Social Workers National Center for Lesbian Rights

National Center for Transgender Equality

National Coalition for LGBT Health National Equality Action Team

National Health Care for the Homeless

Council

National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)

National LGBTQ Task Force

National Queer Asian Pacific Islander

Alliance (NQAPIA)

**NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice** 

Newark LGBTQ Community Center

Newburgh LGBTQ+ Center Oakland LGBTQ Community Ctr.

Oasis Legal Services
Oklahomans for Equality

One Colorado
Our Family Coalition

Out Alliance

OutCenter of Southwest Michigan

OutFront Kalamazoo
OutFront Minnesota

OutNebraska

OutRight Action International Pennsylvania Equality Project Pennsylvania Youth Congress People For the American Way

Persad Center, Inc.
PFLAG Jersey Shore
PFLAG National
PFUND Foundation

Planned Parenthood of the North Country

New York

Pride Center of the Capital Region

Pride Community Center, Inc (Brazos Valley,

Texas)

**Pride Community Services Organization** 

PRIDENTON

Princess Janae Place Inc

PROCEED INC.

Rainbow Community Center of Contra Costa

County RESULTS DC

RI Public Health Institute
Rockland County Pride Center

Safeguarding American Values for Everyone

(SAVE)

San Diego Pride

San Francisco AIDS Foundation
San Francisco Voice & Swallowing

Sero Project SF LGBT Center

Silver State Equality-Nevada

SisTers PGH SpeakOUT Boston Still Bisexual

The Center on Colfax

The Charles Knapper Project

The Diversity Center

The Gala Pride and Diversity Center

The LGBT Center

The LGBT Center of Greater Reading
The LGBTQ Center Long Beach
The LGBTQ Committee of the National

**Action Network** 

The LOFT LGBT Community Services Center

The Montrose Center

The San Diego LGBT Community Center

The Source LGBT+ Center The TransLatin@ Coalition

The Trevor Project

Thomas Judd Care Center
Thundermist Health Center

Transgender Legal Defense and Education

Fund

Trans Empowerment Project

Trans Lifeline

Transgender Law Center

Transgender Resource Center of New

Mexico

Translatina Network

Triangle Community Center
TriVersity Center for Gender and Sexual
Diversity
Tucson Interfaith HIV AIDS Network Inc aka
TIHAN
U.S. People Living With HIV Caucus

Washington County Gay Straight Alliance, Inc. Wellness AIDS Services William Way LGBT Community Center Young Democrats of Georgia LGBTQ (Stonewall) Caucus

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://www.metroweekly.com/2020/04/group-behind-nyc-covid-19-tent-hospital-is-forcing-volunteers-to-abide-by-anti-gay-statement-of-faith/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/23/you-dont-want-second-best/anti-lgbt-discrimination-us-health-care

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ferrannini J. Online Extra: LGBTQ Agenda: State, City Criticized for Not Counting Sexual Orientation of COVID-19 Patients. Bay Area Reporter. April 10, 2020. <a href="https://www.ebar.com/news/latest\_news//290690/online\_extra:-lgbtq\_agenda:\_state,\_city\_criticized-for\_not\_counting\_sexual\_orientation\_of\_covid-19\_patients;">https://www.ebar.com/news/latest\_news//290690/online\_extra:-lgbtq\_agenda:\_state,\_city\_criticized-for\_not\_counting\_sexual\_orientation\_of\_covid-19\_patients;</a>; Johnson C. States Won't Collect LGBTQ Data on COVID-19 – And Advocates Aren't Happy. The Washington Blade. April 1, 2020. <a href="https://www.washingtonblade.com/2020/04/01/states-wont-collect-lgbtq-data-on-covid-19-and-advocates-arent-happy/">https://www.washingtonblade.com/2020/04/01/states-wont-collect-lgbtq-data-on-covid-19-and-advocates-arent-happy/</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/08/nyregion/coronavirus-race-deaths.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Badgett MVL, Choi SK, Wilson BDM. LGBT Poverty in the United States. October 2019. https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-poverty-in-the-united-states/.