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April 8, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the national medical specialty society representing more than 37,400 physicians specializing in psychiatry, we urge the Senate to take up and pass the Equality Act (H.R. 5 / S. 393), which passed the House of Representatives on February 25 of this year.

APA opposes all public and private discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals and supports legally protecting the civil rights of LGBTQ individuals. Accordingly, APA strongly supports the Equality Act (H.R. 5 / S. 393), as it ensures that the definition of gender-based discrimination under existing civil rights laws includes discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

As psychiatrists, APA member physicians see the negative mental health impact that discrimination based on sexual identification has on LGBTQ individuals in many facets of life. Data show that LGBTQ individuals are two and a half times more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and substance misuse compared with heterosexual-identifying individuals, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation report.¹ The rate of mental health crises among the non-heterosexual community is further compounded by systemic barriers and discrimination in accessing health care, employment, and housing.

The Equality Act takes an essential step to clarify and expressly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity under federal law. It ensures that the same legal protections that exist against other forms of gender-based discrimination apply to the kind of stereotype-based discrimination faced by LGBTQ individuals. Therefore, we urge the Senate to pass the Equality Act at the earliest possible opportunity.

If you have any questions, please contact Mike Troubh at mtroubh@psych.org / 202.559.3571.

Sincerely,

Saul Levin, MD, MPA, FRCP-E, FRCPsych
CEO and Medical Director

cc: The Honorable David Cicilline; The Honorable Jeff Merkley

¹ Kates, J, et al. "Health and Access to Care and Coverage For Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals in the U.S. Retrieved." Kaiser Family Foundation. 2016. <http://kff.org/report-section/health-and-access-to-care-and-coverage-for-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-health-challenges/>.