

Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

September 18th, 2019

Dear Councilmembers:

We, the 32 undersigned organizations, are writing in support of the **Care for LGBTQ Seniors and Seniors with HIV Amendment Act of 2019**, Bill 23-37.

This bill amends D.C. law to include LGBTQ older adults and older people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) as those among the “greatest social need” in the administration of programs funded under the Older Americans Act. Federally, this targeting language provides guidelines to states for the design and implementation of services for older adults; however, the Older Americans Act does not explicitly include LGBTQ people and PLWHA under these guidelines. This bill would ensure that LGBTQ older adults and older PLWHA are included in D.C.’s planning for older adult services and supports.

Additionally, this bill would establish a cultural competency training requirement for service providers, and ensure further protection for LGBTQ older adults and PLWHA living in long-term care facilities.

LGBTQ older adults face significant barriers to accessing the services that they need to age with dignity. Currently, Federal law neither protects nor prioritizes the provision of healthcare, long-term care, or home and community-based services (such as those provided through the Older Americans Act) to LGBTQ older adults. Evidence shows that older LGBTQ older adults face unique health disparities and barriers to accessing appropriate services, many of which are driven by discrimination and adverse experiences. However, those LGBTQ older adults who do report receiving culturally competent health and support services in their community report higher physical and emotional quality of life scores, and better overall health. Massachusetts, which has already adopted legislation similar to Bill 23-37, has seen successes in improving the provision of culturally competent services to LGBTQ older adults and their families, and might provide a roadmap for future actions within the District.

Worldwide, nearly half of PLWHA are over the age of 50, and improvements in care for PLWHA have led to longer lifespans and improved quality of life. As of 2017, HAHSTA estimated that nearly half (49.3%) of the PLWHA in Washington, DC were aged 50 and over, with almost one in five PLWHA in the District aged 60 and above.

Despite improvements to the treatment and life expectancy of PLWHA, this population faces more complex co-morbidities and other chronic conditions as they age than the population at large. Additionally, LGBTQ PLWHA face an additional layer of complexity as they age, experiencing higher rates of stigmatization and increased risk of mental health problems and substance use disorders, and they uniquely stand to benefit from improved healthcare and social services designed to meet their needs.

Bill 23-37 would provide an important step forward in addressing these significant disparities in this already vulnerable population and ensure that all District residents can age with dignity.

Sincerely,

Food & Friends

The DC Center for the LGBT Community

Athlete Ally

BiNet USA

CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers

Coalition on Human Needs

D.C. Hunger Solutions

DC Fights Back!!

GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality

HealthHIV

John Snow, Inc. (JSI)

Justice in Aging

La Clinica del Pueblo

Lambda Legal

Legal Services Staff Association, NOLSW/UAW 2320

LGBT Technology Partnership & Institute

Los Angeles LGBT Center

LULAC Lambda Council 11125

Mary's House for Older Adults, Inc.

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

National Center for Lesbian Rights

National Center for Transgender Equality

National Coalition for the Homeless

National LGBT Cancer Network

Positive Women's Network-USA

Pride Action Tank

RESULTS DC

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)

SOME, Inc. (So Others Might Eat)

The Fenway Institute

Treatment Action Group (TAG)

Whitman-Walker Health