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Rhode Island Rep. David Cicilline

U.S. Could Deny Visas to LGBT Rights Offenders

By Thom Senzee

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Rhode Island congressman David Cicilline has introduced a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives intended "to protect the basic human rights of the international LGBT community."

Called the Global Respect Act, Cicilline's bill instructs the State Department to deny U.S. entry visas to egregious violators of LGBT people's rights.

"The United States and the international community have a responsibility to condemn horrific acts of discrimination and targeted violence against all individuals, including egregious offenses based on sexual orientation and gender identity," said the congressman in a statement issued after the bill's introduction Thursday. "The Global Respect Act will protect the rights of the LGBT community across the globe and uphold America's commitment to defending basic human rights in all corners of the world."

An aide to the out congressman told *The Advocate* that the legislation could likely be reconciled with a similar bill recently introduced by Massachusetts senator Ed Markey, perhaps combining to create comprehensive legislation aimed at improving the plights of LGBT people around the world. Speaking on background, the aide noted that Cicilline's bill, which has a growing list of (so far) all Democratic cosponsors, was already in the works long before Markey's bill was introduced in the Senate last week.

Both bills call for State Department monitoring and reporting of global conditions for LGBT people. While Markey's bill would create a special State Department envoy for LGBT issues, Cicilline's bill looks to provide guidance on how the U.S. should deal with known human rights violators.

Human rights and LGBT advocacy groups were quick to express support for the Global Respect Act.

“This bill is an important step in ensuring that the individuals responsible for egregious human rights violations against LGBT people are held to account for their crimes,” said Human Rights First’s Shawn Gaylord in a statement. “We applaud Representative Cicilline’s leadership to ensure that the United States continues to promote safety, freedom and equality for all people.”

The aide said Cicilline and his staff worked closely with human rights groups and LGBT equality advocates to craft an effective bill that would have a strong, positive impact, alleviating the harsh conditions under which LGBT people live in much of the world, noting especially close collaboration with the Human Rights Campaign. In fact, HRC’s response to the bill’s introduction was included in the congressman’s statement — as were remarks from HRF’s president, Elisa Massimino. Massimino complimented Rep. Cicilline for his leadership on the issue of global LGBT rights.

"Hate is not an American value, and those who are involved in passing vicious anti-LGBT laws or inflicting harm on LGBT people should not be welcome in our country," said David Stacy, HRC's government affairs director. "This bill sends a clear message to those who have championed these serious human rights violations that the United States government and the American people fundamentally reject them."

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