

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 27, 2017

The Honorable Thomas E. Price, M.D.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Price:

We write to you regarding proposed changes to two important Federal surveys that would eliminate questions about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals. In particular, we are concerned that the elimination of these questions would make it more difficult to assess whether key programs for older Americans and people with disabilities are meeting the needs of the LGBT community.

On March 13, 2017, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released a draft of this year's National Survey of Older Americans Act Participants. This survey is designed to gather data about people who receive services funded under the Older Americans Act, such as home-delivered and congregate meals, transportation, home care services, and caregiver support. The results of the survey are used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Older Americans Act programs funded through HHS, including who is able to access the programs.

Notably, the draft of this year's survey removed one demographic question asking whether a respondent is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual. This question first appeared on the survey in 2014 and was included in subsequent years. We are troubled that HHS, in its Federal Register notice, stated that it had made "no changes" to the survey. That is the not the case.

HHS has proposed similar revisions for its Centers for Independent Living Annual Program Performance Report survey. This annual report evaluates the effectiveness of programs designed to serve people with disabilities, such as skills training, counseling, and other services. While an initial draft of this survey, released earlier this year, included a question on sexual orientation, the current draft survey removes the sexual orientation question, as well as an option to identify as transgender in answering a question on gender. These appear to be the only notable edits made to the survey.

Older LGBT individuals, as well as LGBT persons with disabilities, face many challenges including financial insecurity, social isolation, discrimination, and barriers to access for aging and accessibility services. We are concerned that removing sexual orientation and gender identity questions from these surveys will limit HHS's ability to address these issues. Sexual orientation and gender identity questions on these surveys were designed to ensure that vital services were reaching vulnerable LGBT Americans. By rolling back data collection, it is possible that the needs of millions of Americans will go unmet.

In order to ensure that key programs for older Americans and people with disabilities are meeting the needs of the LGBT community, we urge you to restore sexual orientation and gender identity questions on the National Survey of Older Americans Act Participants as well as the Centers for Independent Living Annual Program Performance Report survey. We also request a staff briefing on the decision to omit sexual orientation and gender identity questions from these surveys no later than May 5, 2017. Your prompt response is necessary to ensure that these questions are restored in time to be included in the annual surveys.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

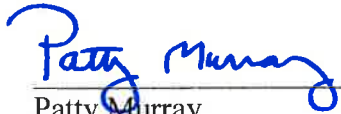
Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



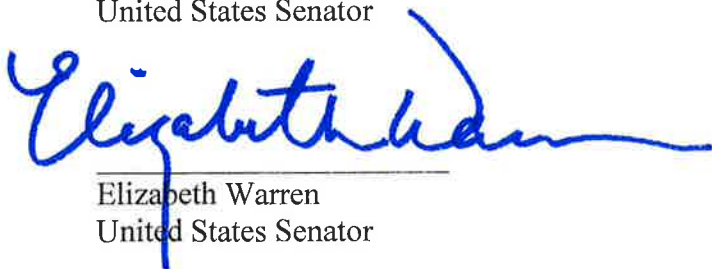
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



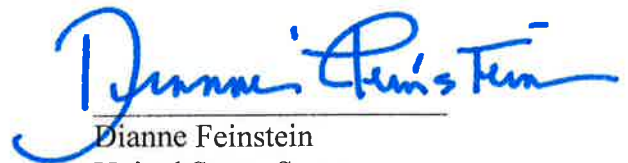
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



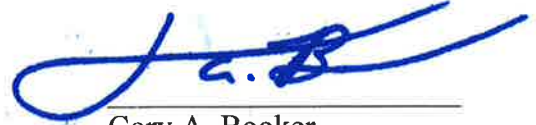
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



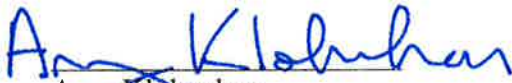
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Al Franken
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



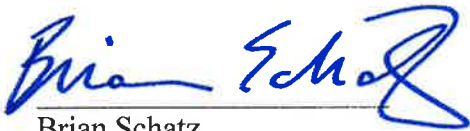
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator