

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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Opening Statement

Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney

House Committee on Oversight and Reform

Hearing on “The Administration’s Religious Liberty Assault on LGBTQ Rights”

February 27, 2020

Good morning. Thank you all for being here today.

When Donald Trump was inaugurated in 2017, many of us worried about the danger that a Republican administration could pose to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people’s rights.

When Donald Trump campaigned, he gave lip service to caring about LGBTQ rights.

But immediately after he took office, his Administration began undermining vital LGBTQ rights.

The White House started out by removing all mentions of LGBTQ rights or people from its website. And it has gone downhill since then.

The Trump Administration quickly dismantled important legal and regulatory protections for LGBTQ people.

It adopted discriminatory rules and undermined protections for LGBTQ people.

LGBTQ people face real dangers in our society. A month ago, a transgender woman, Serena Daniari, was physically attacked in a New York subway by individuals who yelled homophobic slurs at her.

I was horrified that this hate crime happened in New York City—one of the most progressive cities in the world.

Transphobia, racism, and homophobia are real—and LGBTQ people face real harms and real violence in their daily lives. And that is precisely why the federal government must act to protect LGBTQ people against harm.

One of the most cynical aspects of the Administration's effort is how it has emboldened discrimination by distorting claims of "religious liberty." The Trump Administration is dividing America and pitting citizens against each other.

That is a false choice. For years, federal law has protected the right of individuals and organizations to observe religious and moral tenets without unduly burdening the health and welfare of others.

Let me make something crystal clear. I am a strong supporter of religious liberty. But it should not be distorted and twisted into a weapon to enable discrimination.

Scrubbing the White House website of references to gay people has nothing to do with religious freedom. It has everything to do with the Trump Administration's assault on the LGBTQ community.

Today, we will hear directly from some of our distinguished colleagues who understand the importance of protecting and strengthening LGBTQ rights.

We will also hear from witnesses on the forefront of the fight for LGBTQ equality, including individuals who have personally felt the impact of anti-LGBTQ discrimination.

The Oversight Committee will continue to combat this Administration's abuses, and we will support our friends and neighbors who are being unfairly targeted by this President and his Administration.

I want to add one last thing. The House passed the Equality Act on a bipartisan basis on May 17, 2019. That bill would add explicit protections against discrimination for LGBTQ individuals.

The Equality Act is sitting on Mitch McConnell's desk. Senator McConnell won't even give us the courtesy of a debate—even though Senators from his own party support this legislation.

I urge him to change his stance. This is an issue of the utmost importance—for our friends, our neighbors, our children, and our colleagues. America deserves a debate and a vote on the Equality Act.

With that, I would like to thank my friend Jamie Raskin for his leadership on this important issue as Chairman of our Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, and I yield to him.

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