

May 22, 2020

Governor Gina Raimondo
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Governor Raimondo:

The Rhode Island Trans Action Coalition, the National LGBT Cancer Network, and the undersigned organizations extend our profound gratitude for your historic leadership during this crisis.

The Rhode Island Trans Action Coalition is funded by the Department of Health and a key strategy to improve health equity. Our purpose is to advocate for policy and systems changes to improve the health, safety, and wellbeing of trans and gender diverse people in Rhode Island.

The global COVID-19 pandemic is causing incredible challenges for the health of all Rhode Islanders, including our LGBTQ+ community. Population disparities in tobacco use, HIV incidence, homelessness, and cancer diagnosis combined with a history of barriers to care and discrimination, create increased risk factors and vulnerabilities for COVID-19 infection for LGBTQ+ Rhode Islanders.

Early epidemiological analyses spotlighted disparities in death rates for both African American and Latinx populations; these are exactly the type of analyses that also need to be conducted for the LGBTQ+ population. In order to do so, it is critical hospitals and testing sites collect LGBTQ+ demographic data from COVID-19 patients (testing results, hospitalizations, and mortality). Without these data, efforts to limit exposure for the LGBTQ+ community through behavioral change (including community adherence to the sound direction from the Rhode Island Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), as well as clinical efforts to improve care for adversely impacted populations, will be limited.

We understand many hospitals and clinics are overwhelmed. And we know some still do not collect sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data on their patients. However, many hospitals and health centers already do collect this data and should be positioned to readily provide this information to the State. **We respectfully request you utilize your power to mandate LGBTQ+ demographic data collection related to COVID-19 testing, diagnosis, hospitalization, and mortality in Rhode Island.**

There is growing momentum on collecting COVID-19 LGBTQ+ data at the state level. Last week, Pennsylvania became the first state to declare they will include sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) questions on case history investigations after contact with those who test positive for COVID-19. Michigan has added gender identity to their COVID case finding form. Washington and New Mexico are adding SOGI demographic questions to upcoming COVID-19 surveys. California and New Jersey have introduced legislation to require COVID-19 SOGI data collection and reporting. Several other states, counties and municipalities are working on similar proposals as well.

Rhode Island has been on the forefront of LGBTQ+ rights for many years, including some recent gains that can be directly attributed to your commitment to equality. Rhode Island is also on the forefront of state-led COVID-19 response strategies thanks to your incredible leadership in the face of this scary pandemic. **We are now asking for you to be on the forefront of states collecting**

COVID-19 LGBTQ+ data so we may plan an appropriate and equitable response to protect LGBTQ+ Rhode Islanders from this dangerous virus.

We also respectfully request a designated seat at the Equity Considerations table for at least one member of a racial and/or ethnic minority who is also a member of the LGBTQ+ community. There is ample evidence that people of color who are also LGBTQ+ face unique challenges and barriers. They are also less likely to have familial or community-level support. It is imperative that when we address health disparities, we do so with an intersectional approach.

Thank you for your continued leadership in this crisis for your unwavering commitment to health equity. We look forward to collaborating to improve the health and wellbeing of all Rhode Islanders, especially those in the LGBTQ+ community.

Sincerely,

Rhode Island Trans Action Coalition* and the **National LGBT Cancer Network**

Thundermist Health Center*

TGI Network of RI*

Youth Pride Inc.*

Providence Youth Student Movement*

Project Weber/Renew*

Sojourner House*

Additional Signers:

West Warwick Health Equity Zone

Woonsocket Health Equity Zone

Central Providence Health Equity Zone

Cranston Health Equity Zone

Newport Health Equity Zone

Newport Health Equity Zone LGBTQ+ Health Working Group

Bristol Health Equity Zone

Pawtucket/Central Falls Health Equity Zone

Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds Washington County

Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights

Rhode Island Pride

GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders

LGBTQ Action RI

Black & Pink Providence

SAGE RI

Rhode Island College School of Social Work

Rhode Island Public Health Institute

Center for Health Promotion and Health Equity, Brown University

Department of Behavioral and Social Sciences, Brown University School of Public Health

Brown Family Medicine Residency

Open Door Health

The Center for Sexual Pleasure and Health

Child & Family

Alien Athletes

Women's Resource Center

Shape Center

Michelle Forcier, MD, MPH

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CC:

Secretary Jones

Dr. Alexander-Scott

Ken Brindamour

Kim Ahern