



WHITMAN-WALKER HEALTH

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STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR DC BILL DC BILL 23-0037, CARE FOR LGBTQ SENIORS AND SENIORS WITH HIV AMENDMENT ACT OF 2019 July 15, 2019

Older persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer/questioning (LGBTQ) face many challenges. LGBTQ elders must cope with a health care system, and programs like Social Security and Medicaid, that systematically discriminate against them. Long-term care facilities, home health care services and senior services are often ignorant of their needs and in too many cases hostile to them. Many LGBTQ older persons lack traditional family support, and suffer from isolation that can worsen as they get older and their “families of choice” grow old as well.

Growing old also presents particular challenges for people living with HIV. Thanks to medical breakthroughs since the late 1990’s, people with HIV now look forward to substantially longer lives and a much improved quality of life. But our long-term care system is not prepared to meet their needs as they age, and discrimination by nursing homes, assisted living facilities, home health care services and senior service providers persists. And persons aging with HIV experience many complex health issues in addition to the health challenges of aging itself.

Whitman-Walker health care providers and lawyers see many of these issues first-hand. A growing number of our patients – 20% in 2018 – are over the age of 50. Almost one-half of our patients identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or otherwise non-heterosexual, and of those, 17% are 50 or older. Of our patients living with HIV, 40% are over 50. More than 50% of our Legal Services clients identify as non-heterosexual; 20% identify as transgender or non-binary; 50% are living with HIV; and 41% of our legal clients are 50 or older.

The Care for LGBTQ Seniors and Seniors With HIV Amendment Act, Bill 23-37, is a major step forward in addressing the unique and compelling needs of these DC residents. We congratulate Councilmembers Cheh, Bonds, Nadeau, Gray, T. White, Allen, McDuffie, Todd, Silverman, and R. White for introducing the bill, and Councilmembers Grosso and Evans for co-sponsoring this important legislation.

The bill would amend DC law to designate LGBTQ older persons, and seniors living with HIV, as groups with “greatest social need.” This official acknowledgement would make these communities eligible for increased funding and programs to meet their specific needs. This

promises to correct the historic trend of under-funding senior services for LGBTQ persons and persons living with HIV.

In addition, the bill would amend the DC Human Rights Act to protect LGBTQ and HIV-positive residents of long-term care facilities, and applicants for such facilities, against discrimination and harassment. The bill would expressly protect the right of transgender and gender-non-binary residents to respectful, gender-affirming treatment, and would also protect their right to privacy. LGBTQ persons, and individuals living with HIV, are very apprehensive of being mistreated or harassed, or having their needs ignored, in nursing homes, assisted living facilities or other community residence facilities.

We urge the Committee on Government Operations to hold a hearing on this groundbreaking bill at the earliest reasonable opportunity.

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