

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 8, 2019

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
US Department of State
2201 C Street Northwest
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

As the United States prepares for the 2019 United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), we urge the Administration to constructively collaborate with international partners to shape global standards for gender equality and advance policies that promote the rights of women and girls. Over the last two years, the United States has misused the United Nations as a political forum, undermining progress to advance the rights and health of women and girls. This year, we ask that you correct course from past polarizing policies by selecting a delegation that includes subject matter experts specializing in gender equality and women's health, as well as ensuring the United States delegation advocates for policies that improve social, economic, and political opportunities for women and girls.

At the CSW in 2017 and 2018, the United States took a hardline stance on sexual health and reproductive health language that was out of line with international consensus. Further, at the Commission on Population and Development (CPD), this position stalled negotiations and contributed to a failure to produce a final resolution both years. This is contrary to the United States' longstanding tradition as a champion for the rights of women and girls. We strongly oppose any effort to remove or restrict reproductive health and sexual health language, as it undermines the human rights of women around the world. When women's sexual and reproductive rights are limited, so too are their pathways to economic, social, and political empowerment. Recognizing this intersection is integral to productive discussions on women's empowerment. Many countries are working to bolster sexual health and reproductive rights and any effort to narrow the scope or roll back existing agreements and commitments would have detrimental effects on the health of women and girls.

Similarly, the United States delegation to the CSW must include recognized and respected leaders who support the mission of the CSW and are dedicated to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The last two United States delegations included individuals who did not represent our country's values and exemplified a blatant disregard for the mission of the CSW. Individuals who espouse inflammatory and transphobic rhetoric, have no place representing our country on the world stage. Rather, we ask that the delegation include individuals with substantive professional experience and demonstrated commitment to the CSW, particularly in regards to improving access to social protection systems for women and girls.

We encourage the United States to collaborate with members of the international community and civil society to establish concrete commitments to address the endemic societal factors preventing women and girls from achieving equal opportunities. This year's CSW will focus on "social protection systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls." We look forward to seeing all member states, including the United States, address and rectify gender biases and gaps in these three issue areas. This should include support for policies that enable women to obtain gainful employment, prevent gender based violence and discrimination, as well as improve public services – particularly in regards to addressing gaps in women's access to reproductive healthcare and sexual education.

The international community has made significant progress in protecting the rights of women and girls, much of which is attributed to the incorporation of reproductive health services into programs that improve access to education, nutrition, and primary health care. We stand ready to work with the Administration to advance this progress and expect the United States to pursue policies that uphold the rights of women and girls at this year's CSW. Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing from you.

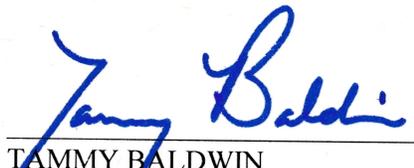
Sincerely,



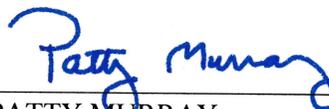
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



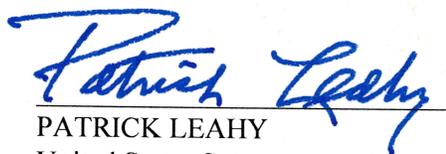
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United States Senate



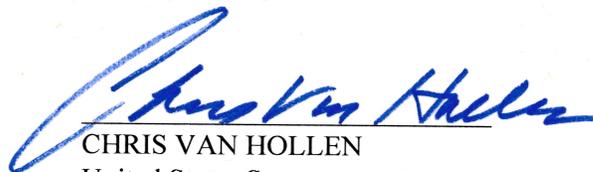
TAMMY BALDWIN
United States Senate



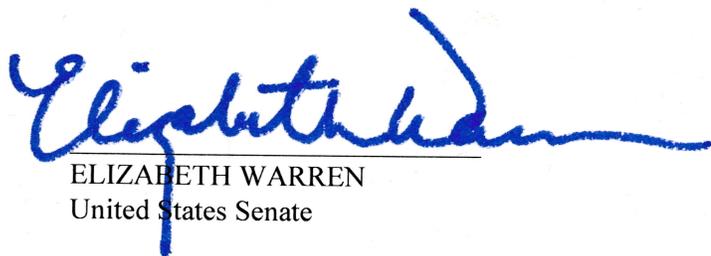
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PATRICK LEAHY
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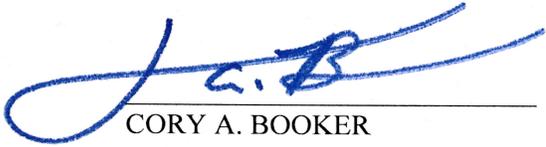
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