



Mike McGinn, Mayor
City of Seattle

September 13, 2013

Andrey Yushmanov
Consul General of the Russian Federation in Seattle
600 University St #2510
Seattle, WA 98101

Dear Mr. Yushmanov,

Thank you for your letter regarding the demonstration held in support of the rights of the LGBT community in Russia.

I find it paramount to support Seattle's values, and to stand with human rights activists as they do the same.

In your role as Consul General you must be familiar with Seattle's record on LGBT rights. We have witnessed a sea change for LGBT rights in our city, state and country. LGBT people in Seattle enjoy full equality under the law. This includes the right to marry, the right to adopt children, the right to assemble and the right to promote LGBT values, among other things.

The City of Seattle also demonstrates leadership in support of its LGBT employees. Two years ago we started offering transgender health benefits to our employees because we believe that no employee should be denied appropriate health services when they are in need. Before the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was repealed, we filed amicus briefs against it, largely because it forced us to tax our employees in same-sex marriages differently than those in opposite-sex relationships. This summer we decided to fly the Pride flag at City Hall to honor our commitment to LGBT rights and show our solidarity with the community.

In your letter you state that Russia has been wrongly portrayed as being intolerant toward the LGBT community. I disagree. Tolerance of homosexuality means not calling its legality in to question. Tolerance of homosexuality means affording the same rights to LGBT citizens that other citizens enjoy. The laws recently signed by your president, Vladimir Putin, are intolerant.

These laws criminalize LGBT advocacy and activity that reflects "non-traditional" values. They prohibit the adoption of children by gay couples or single parents. They empower law enforcement officers to arrest and detain tourists and foreigners suspected of promoting homosexuality or being sympathetic toward the LGBT community.

If these laws are upheld, the very organizations you cite as proof of LGBT inclusion in Russia may be legally blocked from performing their missions of inclusion, equal rights and other efforts to support the LGBT community in Russia.

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The Explanatory Note to Article 6.13.1, *Propaganda of homosexuality among minors*, quoted in your letter, calls on the "legitimate interests of minors," as a justification for these laws. The very notion that promotion of same-sex love can be "injurious to the wellbeing" of a child seems incongruent with the basic tenets of equality. Should children be taught that one form of love is superior to another? Children do not need protection from love, nor should they be taught to condone violence. These policies have had the effect of normalizing the contrary. They have the effect of marginalizing a minority group. They condemn homosexuality while promoting reticence in the face of hate-based violence.

You say that tolerance cannot be selective. Yet these laws are selectively intolerant. They choose to deny one class of citizens the same rights that other citizens are awarded.

I believe these are the policies of a leadership that has chosen to target a minority group for its own gain. It is not an "opinion" with which I am in disagreement, but rather a set of discriminatory laws established by Putin.

These laws are in direct contrast to the City of Seattle's policies and values regarding LGBT people. I stand with the conviction that these Russian laws, which negatively affect LGBT people and their families, should be repealed.

Using state powers to attack the basic rights of an individual is not merely intolerant; it is an all too common practice of those who fear the inclusion of all. It is a tactic we have seen throughout history, including in the United States. And it is used by those who prefer to grasp tightly the prejudicial powers of the few over the greater and deeper powers of equality. It may serve its intended purpose for a time, but it has never prevailed.

Thank you for your letter. I look forward to continuing this discussion with you.

Sincerely,



Mike McGinn
Mayor of Seattle