

May 19, 2021

Ruth Ryder
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Programs
U.S. Department of Education
Office of Elementary and Secondary School
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202

Re: Comments regarding proposed priorities for the American History and Civics Education programs [Docket ID ED-2019-SCC-0119]

Dear Ms. Ryder:

As organizations committed to building K-12 learning communities that advance racial, gender, and disability justice, we strongly support the Department in prioritizing antiracism and agree that “[i]t is critical that the teaching of American history and civics creates learning experiences that validate and reflect the diversity, identities, histories, contributions, and experiences of all students.”¹ To strengthen Proposed Priority 1, we urge the Department to add “sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression and perspectives on the experiences of women to item b) of the proposed application,” which currently requires applicants to describe how their proposed project includes teaching and learning practices that “incorporate racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse perspectives and perspectives on the experience of individuals with disabilities.”²

American history and civics education that does not include the stories and contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) people—including LGBTQ+ people of color and people with disabilities—will fall short of the Department’s goal of “supporting teaching and learning that reflects the breadth and depth of our Nation’s diverse history and the vital role of diversity in our Nation’s democracy.”³ Similarly, classroom readings that continue to represent women as supporting actors and fail to represent women at the intersection of two or more marginalized identities will fall short of the Department’s worthy goal.⁴ Histories of racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic discrimination cannot be disentangled from histories of women and LGBTQ+ communities. For example, Tribal Nations’ struggle to uphold principles of sovereignty and self-determination includes rejecting efforts to denigrate and erase the experiences of Two Spirit/LGBTQ+ American Indians/Alaska Native people.⁵

LGBTQ+ people, who often hold multiple marginalized identities, have been and continue to be powerful agents of change in American history. Transgender women of color, including Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, were leaders of the 1969 protests against unjust police raids of the New York City gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, that ignited the national movement for LGBTQ+ justice.⁶ Dr. Margaret Chung, a queer Chinese-American woman, advocated for Chinese-Americans’ and women’s right to vote at a time when both were denied.⁷ James Baldwin, a Black gay man and award-winning novelist, educated the American public on the civil rights movement

through essays published in national magazines and by speaking throughout the American South as a member of the Congress of Racial Equality.⁸ Recent history provides similar examples: queer, disabled women of color spearheaded today's disability justice movement⁹ and two of the three Black women who founded the Black Lives Matter movement identify as queer.¹⁰

LGBTQ+ people have shaped our past and our present and should be included in American history and civics education. Unfortunately, extensive nationwide research from GLSEN, the nation's leading organization on LGBTQ+ issues in K-12 education, has consistently indicated a lack of visibility and representation of LGBTQ+ people's stories and contributions in classroom settings. Most recently, GLSEN's 2019 National School Climate Survey found that **only 11.6% of LGBTQ+ students reported being taught positive things about LGBTQ+ people, history, or events in their history or social studies classes**; further, 17.0% were taught about LGBTQ+ topics in a negative manner in one or more of their classes, such as being taught that being gay leads to contracting HIV.¹¹

The inclusion of women and LGBTQ+ communities in Proposed Priority 1 for American History and Civics Education programs aligns with the Administration's intersectional policy framework on advancing racial equity as communicated in Executive Order 13985,¹² as well as its policy to prevent and combat discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation and "to address overlapping forms of discrimination," communicated in Executive Order 13988.¹³ It also aligns with the Administration's commitment to "support gender equity and combat gender stereotypes in education."¹⁴ Finally, the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people and women supports the implementation of Executive Order 14021, guaranteeing an educational environment free from discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual orientation and gender identity, by prioritizing a proven support for young people who identify as LGBTQ+ students.¹⁵

GLSEN's research conducted over the past twenty years has consistently found a positive association between inclusive curricular resources and school climate and outcomes for LGBTQ+ students.¹⁶ Those with access to LGBTQ+ inclusive curricula were less likely to feel unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression, more likely to report acceptance by fellow students, and reported greater feelings of school belonging.¹⁷ These findings are consistent across LGBTQ+ students of color.¹⁸ Inclusive curricular resources may also be related to racially inclusive practices at school; GLSEN found that LGBTQ+ Black, Latinx, and Asian American and Pacific Islander students with access to LGBTQ+ inclusive curricula were also less likely to report feeling unsafe because of their race or ethnicity.¹⁹ Students with access to inclusive curricula also reported higher GPAs, a greater likelihood of pursuing post-secondary education, higher levels of self-esteem, and lower levels of depression.²⁰ The absence of LGBTQ+ inclusive supports, such as classrooms where LGBTQ+ young people feel safe, seen and affirmed, is associated with depression and suicidality, which LGBTQ+ youth, including Black LGBTQ+ youth, report at higher rates than their non-LGBTQ+ peers.²¹ Other research echoes GLSEN's with regard to the supports that LGBTQ+ inclusive curricula provide.²²

Unfortunately, we have seen insufficient change with regard to LGBTQ+ representation in lessons and textbooks and other assigned content over nearly two decades even as LGBTQ+ students have reported significant increases in access to LGBTQ+ content via school libraries and online materials.²³ In fact, four states *prohibit* discussion of LGBTQ+ people in a positive light.²⁴ While

these so-called “No Promo Homo” statutes typically apply an anti-LGBTQ+ prohibition to personal and sexual health education, studies suggest the impact extends to other subjects and fosters negative school climates for LGBTQ+ students.²⁵ In Texas, the prohibition applies to all education programs.²⁶ By including LGBTQ+ people in Proposed Priority 1, the Department signals that excellence in American History and Civics Education requires the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people and attention to how identities we often treat as distinct—including race, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity—intersect and shape the challenges, opportunities, and lived experiences of Americans.²⁷

We commend the Department for prioritizing antiracism in its American history and Civics education programs and urge the Department to implement the Administration’s policy of addressing intersecting forms of discrimination by enumerating LGBTQ+ communities and women in Proposed Priority 1 for its American History and Civics Education programs. If you have any questions, please contact Aaron Ridings of GLSEN at 202-621-5815 or aaron.ridings@glsen.org.

Sincerely,

GLSEN
American Atheists
American School Counselor Association
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Center for American Progress
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF)
EDGE Consulting Partners
Education Law Center PA
EduColor
Feminist Majority Foundation
Human Rights Campaign
Mazzoni Center
Movement Advancement Project
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Teacher Residencies
National Center for Youth Law
National Education Association
National Equality Action Team (NEAT)
National History Day
National Organization for Women
National Women’s Political Caucus
National Women's Law Center
New America Education Policy Program

SPLC Action Fund
Stop Sexual Assault in Schools
Student Voice
The Trevor Project
VA NOW, Inc.

¹ Proposed Priorities-American History and Civics Education. 86 Fed. Reg. §73 (April 19, 2021).

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-04-19/pdf/2021-08068.pdf>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ The Congressional Commission on the American Museum of Women's History. (November 16, 2016). The American Museum of Women's History: Report to the President of the United States and Congress, p/ 18. http://www.amwh.us/report/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/AWMH_11_07_16_Digital.pdf.

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⁵ Edmo, Se-ah-dom and Aaron Ridings, editors. (2017, March 16). Tribal Equity Toolkit 3.0: Tribal Resolutions and Codes to Support Two Spirit & LGBT Justice in Indian Country. <https://www.thetaskforce.org/tribal-equity-toolkit-3-0/>.

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⁶ Jacobs, Julia. (2019, March 29). Two Transgender Activists Are Getting a Monument in New York. *New York Times*.

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⁹ Lamm, Nomy. (2015, September 2). This Is Disability Justice. *The Body Is Not An Apology*.

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¹⁰ Zonkel, Phillip. (2020, June 9). Patrisse Cullors talks queer Pride, Black Lives Matter, political art. *Q Voice News*,

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¹¹ Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools*, p. 58. New York: GLSEN.

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¹² Executive Order 13985 of January 20, 2021. 86 Fed. Reg. §14 (January 25, 2021). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-01-25/pdf/2021-01753.pdf>.

¹³ Executive Order 13988 of January 20, 2021. 86 Fed. Reg. §14 (January 25, 2021). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-01-25/pdf/2021-01761.pdf>.

¹⁴ Executive Order 14020 of March 8, 2021. 86 Fed. Reg. §46 (March 11, 2021). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-03-11/pdf/2021-05183.pdf>.

¹⁵ Executive Order 14021 of March 8, 2021. 86 Fed. Reg. §46 (March 11, 2021). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-03-11/pdf/2021-05200.pdf>.

¹⁶ GLSEN. (March 2020). *Curricular Standards that Include LGBTQ+ Representation Promote Student Achievement and Wellbeing*. <https://www.glsen.org/activity/inclusive-curriculum-standards>. Accessed May 17, 2021.

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