

January 9, 2017

The Honorable Reginald Jones-Sawyer
Co-Chair, Special Committee on the Office of the Attorney General
State Capitol, Room 4126
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Mark Stone
Co-Chair, Special Committee on the Office of the Attorney General
State Capitol, Room 3146
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Congressman Xavier Becerra for California Attorney General – SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymembers Jones-Sawyer and Stone,

Equality California (EQCA) is pleased to support Governor Brown's nomination of Congressman (Rep.) Xavier Becerra as California's next Attorney General. Equality California is the nation's largest statewide lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) civil rights organization dedicated to creating a fair and just society. With the prospect that civil rights laws and programs protecting the LGBT community will be under attack for the next four years, we are confident that Rep. Becerra will serve our community with distinction as the state's top law enforcement official.

Rep. Becerra is a proud member of the Congressional LGBT Caucus and has been a strong ally of the LGBT community for many years. He was one of only 67 members of Congress who opposed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 1996, has been a vocal supporter of marriage equality, and has championed other LGBT priorities, including passage of the federal Equality Act and the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in demographic data collection.

As the next Attorney General assumes office, there are several areas of importance for LGBT Californians on which we will look for leadership. As you know, California has long been on the vanguard of passing LGBT civil rights legislation. Many times, the groundbreaking laws we enact here are challenged in court, such as SB 1172 (Lieu, 2012), which banned the harmful practice of sexual orientation conversion therapy, and AB 1266 (Ammiano, 2013), which allowed transgender students to participate in school programs and activities in accordance with their gender identity. We will look to the incoming Attorney General to vigorously defend against challenges to these and other laws that protect and advance the civil rights of LGBT Californians. In addition, we expect other key LGBT issues to present in federal courts. For example, there currently is a case under review by the United States Supreme Court involving a challenge by a Virginia student, Gavin Grimm, to a school policy excluding transgender students from communal restrooms. In cases such as this, the Attorney General has the ability to engage via an amicus brief on behalf of the State of California. We would hope to see this level of proactive involvement in high-profile federal litigation.

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Attorney General Harris was a strong partner with Equality California, co-sponsoring or supporting legislation such as AB 1887 (Low, 2016), preventing California-funded travel to states with a license to discriminate; SB 1306 (Leno, 2014), conforming California family law to marriage equality; AB 2501 (Bonilla, 2014), eliminating so-called "gay panic" and "trans panic" defenses; and SB 1408 (Allen, 2016), which removed a felony penalty for organ transfers between HIV-positive donors and recipients. We are hopeful that the next Attorney General will play a similar partnership role in our work.

The Attorney General also has a critical job to do when it comes to criminal justice issues that impact LGBT people, including hate crimes tracking and enforcement, racial and identity profiling, and safety and medical care for transgender individuals who are incarcerated. We will appreciate having a robust dialog with the Attorney General on these and other public safety issues over which the Department of Justice has significant influence.

Lastly, we hope the new Attorney General will take as active a role as possible in working to block efforts to dismantle federal programs and protections that are essential for LGBT people. This includes the Affordable Care Act, which brings quality, affordable healthcare to millions of LGBT people who would otherwise lack coverage due to HIV status or preexisting conditions, and an executive order related to the applicability of Title IX to transgender students, to name a couple of examples. Federal funding that is critical for LGBT service providers, such as the state's many LGBT community centers, is also precarious, and we hope the Attorney General will explore all possible avenues to block such funding cuts.

Rep. Becerra brings years of experience gained in the California Attorney General's Office, in the State Legislature, and in Congress. We are confident that he will join other state officials in defending the civil rights of LGBT people, women, people of color, immigrants, and the many communities that have been threatened following the election of Donald Trump as President. We are confident that, as the son of working-class Mexican immigrants, Rep. Becerra will ensure that California stands strong against unfairness and discrimination. For these reasons, EQCA enthusiastically supports the confirmation of Rep. Xavier Becerra as California's next Attorney General.

Sincerely,



Rick Zbur
Executive Director



Alice Kessler
Legislative Director

cc: Members and Staff, Special Committee on the Office of the Attorney General
Cindy Morante, Special Committee Secretary