

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 16, 2022

Gianni Infantino, President
Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)
FIFA-Strasse 20
8044
Zurich, Switzerland

Dear Mr. Infantino:

We write today with concern regarding FIFA’s decision to penalize players in the 2022 World Cup for wearing “OneLove” armbands in support of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as reports that spectators wearing clothing in support of the LGBTQ+ community faced confrontation from officials at events.

It is our understanding that team captains from several European teams competing in the World Cup intended to wear OneLove armbands as a signal of support for LGBTQ+ inclusion and diversity, but were instructed by FIFA that doing so would result in the issuance of in-game sanctions (e.g. yellow cards). This is in contrast to the typical monetary fine issued for uniform violations, and ultimately deterred players from adorning their uniforms with the armbands. We write to express our deep concern with these unprecedented actions taken by FIFA to silence players in their attempt to advocate for the worthy and legitimate cause of LGBTQ+ rights.

Soccer is often called the universal language, but FIFA’s position undermines the sport’s power of transcending divisions and bringing people together. The association’s practices have not been limited to the players, either. We are also concerned about reports that spectators wearing apparel or bearing symbols that show support for the LGBTQ+ community have been detained, harassed, denied entry to events, or have had their apparel or possessions confiscated. These actions have culminated in a message to LGBTQ+ people that neither they nor their allies are welcome at the World Cup, contrary to several public statements made about the tournament.

Moreover, these actions stand in stark contrast to FIFA’s own commitments. FIFA has promoted its own “No Discrimination” campaign, featuring different captains’ armbands, and released a statement indicating that, “FIFA is an inclusive organization and supports all legitimate causes, such as ‘One Love’.” If FIFA believes itself to be an inclusive organization that supports causes like the OneLove movement, then its erasure of the movement’s armbands and other LGBTQ+ symbols and apparel in support of its own campaign runs counter to its public attestations about the values it espouses.

Sports are about belonging, well-being, and affirming one’s place amongst their peers and fellow fans. Indeed, with the 2026 World Cup set to be hosted by in North America—including 60 matches set to be played in the United States—we cannot remain silent while this discrimination continues. Every person—regardless of who they are or whom they love—has the right to be treated with decency and respect, and to live their life free from fear of discrimination. No one should be denied the opportunity to participate in daily life or their love of a sport because of who they are, and no one should be silenced for standing up for those rights.

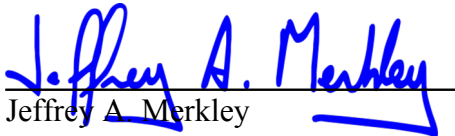
We implore FIFA to meaningfully reaffirm the principle that harassment and discrimination are not tolerated at their sanctioned events, consistent with the association’s own campaign and public statements. Specifically, we ask:

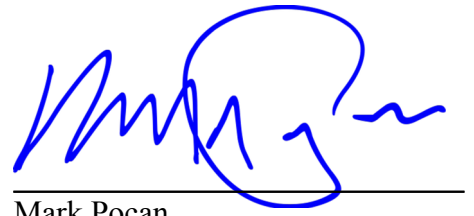
1. To what extent will FIFA consider government's track record on LGBTQ+ rights when determining where to host future World Cups?
2. Will FIFA commit to consistent future policies with respect to players' uniforms; fans' apparel, signs, and symbols; and other forms of expression that allows for individuals to demonstrate support for the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups?
3. Will FIFA commit to reviewing its protocols for how it engages with host country governments?

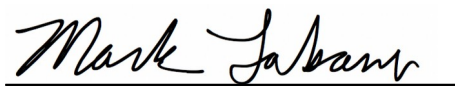
As the most watched sporting event in the world, the World Cup has a responsibility to adhere to international rights and norms regarding freedom of expression. And with the next World Cup taking place in the United States as well as in Mexico and Canada, as well as the 2023 Women's World Cup set to begin in just over 200 days, we will be watching closely to ensure that the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups are treated with respect.

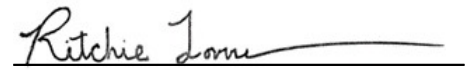
We look forward to your prompt response and assurances that future FIFA events are inclusive to all.

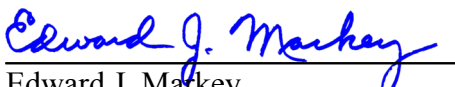
Sincerely,


Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

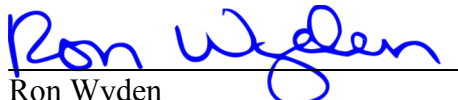

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

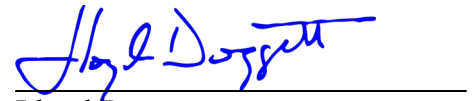

Mark Takano
Member of Congress



Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress

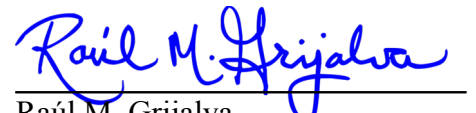

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

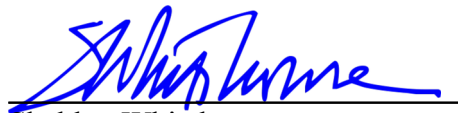

Dina Titus
Member of Congress

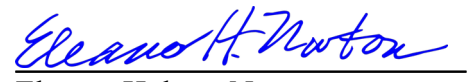

Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

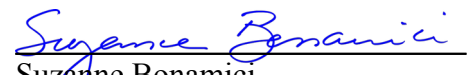

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

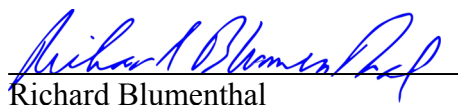

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

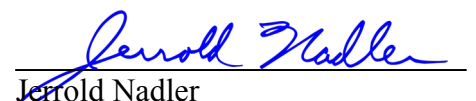

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

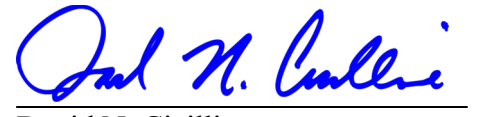

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

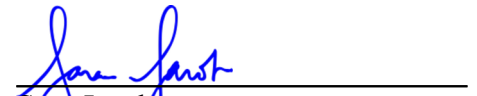

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

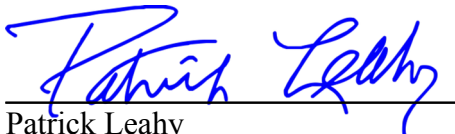

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

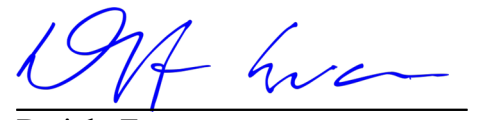

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator


Angie Craig
Member of Congress


Jack Reed
United States Senator


Dwight Evans
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Cory A. Booker
United States Senator


Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress



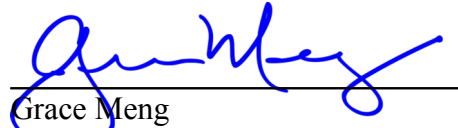
Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress



Nikema Williams
Member of Congress



Chris Pappas
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress