

February 12, 2013

Los Angeles City Council
Los Angeles City Hall
200 North Spring St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Suspension of Los Angeles' "Sister City" Status with St. Petersburg, Russia

Dear Councilmembers:

The ACLU of Southern California and the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center write to request that the Council vote to sever the City of Los Angeles' "sister city" ties to St. Petersburg, Russia.

In doing so, Los Angeles would be joining a growing number of cities around the world that have taken similar measures recently, in response to St. Petersburg's passage of increasingly repressive laws directed at the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. It is our understanding that Los Angeles has already suspended "sister city" relationships with other cities—most notably Tehran, capital of perennial human rights violator Iran—after that country's revolution in 1979.

In March 2012, the city of St. Petersburg, Russia passed an ordinance banning "public action aimed at propagandizing sodomy, lesbianism, bisexualism, and transgenderism among minors." Particularly troubling is the law's aim at preventing youth from accessing the information they may need to help them deal with their own sexual orientation and/or gender nonconformity. Since its passage, police have arrested dozens of people, including LGBT-rights advocates, for expressing support for the LGBT community.

The ACLU was founded to defend and secure rights established by the Constitution and Bill of Rights—including the freedoms of speech, association and religion, freedom of the press, and the right to privacy, to equal protection of the laws and to due process—and to extend these rights to people who have been excluded from their protection. The ACLU of Southern California accomplishes its mission through lobbying, public education, and litigation.

The L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center, the world's largest LGBT organization, has been building the health, advocating for the rights and enriching the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people since 1969.

Both of our organizations take pride in our service to Los Angeles' LGBT community, particularly its youth. We are concerned about the implicit message Los Angeles' LGBT youth may discern from a continued relationship between Los Angeles and St. Petersburg, absent some change in the law there.

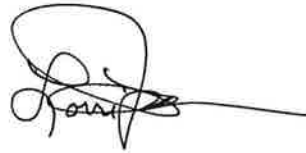
As one of the largest and most prominent of St. Petersburg's "sister cities" around the world, it is particularly important for the Council to act to suspend this relationship, which the City of Los Angeles has enjoyed since 1993, until St. Petersburg repeals the laws that are being used there to oppress its LGBT residents.

We strongly urge you to vote to sever the City of Los Angeles' sister-city relationship with St. Petersburg, Russia to send a strong message that Los Angeles is a global city committed to the diversity of its residents, and will not be linked to any city that is not.

Sincerely,



James Gilliam
Deputy Executive Director
ACLU of Southern California



Lorri Jean
CEO
L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center

cc: Mayor Antonio Villagraigosa