March 16, 2021

Chair Dick Durbin
United State Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Durbin:

I am writing on behalf of the HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA) to offer our strong support for the Equality Act, S. 393 / H.R. 5 (117). HIVMA represents nearly 6,000 physicians, researchers and other health care professionals who provide HIV prevention, care and treatment and conduct research in communities across the U.S.

Thank you for holding the hearing The Equality Act: LGBTQ Rights are Human Rights on March 17 to highlight the impacts of discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation. HIVMA strongly opposes laws and policies that discriminate against LGBTQ individuals because of their impact on individual and public health. As HIV clinicians and researchers, our members continue to see firsthand how these policies impede the response to the HIV and other infectious diseases epidemics in the U.S. The Equality Act would address these harmful policies by amending the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation and gender identity in key areas, including employment, housing, public accommodations, education and federally funded programs.

Stigma and discrimination create barriers to health care and other services that impact the health of LGBTQ people and in particular transgender individuals. A national survey found that 14% percent of transgender individuals experience homelessness, 30% live in poverty, 30% have experienced discrimination within the healthcare system, and 28% avoid the healthcare system due to fear of discrimination. We see the impact of the challenges that transgender individuals face as directly contributing to higher rates of HIV with an estimated 19% prevalence of HIV among transgender women and estimates as high as a 10% HIV prevalence among transgender men. Strong non-discrimination protections are urgently needed at the federal level to ensure that all LGBTQ people regardless of where they live have access to the services they need to stay healthy.

Passing the Equality Act is important to ensuring basic human rights for LGBTQ people and in doing so it is a critical step to improving our nation’s public health and to ending HIV as an epidemic in the U.S. Thank you for the opportunity submit comments for this important hearing. Please contact the HIVMA senior policy and advocacy manager Jose A. Rodriguez at JRodriguez@hivma.org with questions regarding our comments or support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Rajesh T. Gandhi, MD, FIDSA
Chair, HIVMA