April 15, 2015

United States Commission on Civil Rights
1331 Pennsylvania Ave., NW Suite 1150
Washington, DC 20425
Submitted via publiccomments@usccr.gov

Re: AAUW comments on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights’ Briefing on Workplace Discrimination Against LGBT Americans

Dear Sir/Madam:

On behalf of the more than 170,000 members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I am pleased to share AAUW’s comments on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights’ Briefing on Workplace Discrimination Against LGBT Americans. AAUW’s member-adopted 2013-15 Public Policy Program strongly opposes “all forms of discrimination” and supports “equitable economic opportunities.” AAUW’s policy platform also affirms our commitment to “vigorous protection of and full access to civil and constitutional rights” as well as “freedom in definition of family and guarantee of civil rights in all family structures.”

Current federal employment laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender, national origin, age, and disability. However, sexual orientation and gender identity are omitted from these federal protections, leaving these communities marginalized and without legal safeguards. AAUW strongly supports the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) as a model for inclusion of “sexual orientation and gender identity” within federal employment laws. ENDA was passed in the Senate during the 113th Congress with strong support, but unfortunately it did not pass the House. AAUW continues to support ENDA because it has the potential to impact the lives of countless LGBT Americans.

Hardworking Americans should not be kept from supporting their families and making a positive contribution to the economic life of our nation because of characteristics that have no bearing whatsoever on their ability to do a job. Yet it remains legal in the majority of states to fire or refuse to hire someone simply because of his or her sexual orientation or gender identity. In 2014, only 18 states plus the District of Columbia had in place state-wide employment non-discrimination laws that cover both sexual orientation and gender identity. AAUW promotes “the economic, social, and physical well-being of all persons,” and central to that is an economy which allows for full participation from all citizens.

We strongly encourage the Commission on Civil Rights to support policies and legislation, such as ENDA, that protect LGBT workers and strengthen anti-discrimination regulations. We must be equally committed to ending the particular kinds of prejudice and harassment that all LGBT Americans, and especially women who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, and transgender face. To ignore those realities is to disregard systemic discrimination. We believe in empowerment for all, not in empowerment for some.
Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on this important issue. I look forward to working with you to protect Americans’ civil rights at work. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 202-785-7720, or Erin Prangley, associate director of government relations, at 202-728-7730.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Maatz  
Vice President of Government Relations

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