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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement

Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney

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Hearing on “The Rise of Anti-LGBTQI+ Violence and Extremism in the United States”

December 14, 2022

It is with a heavy heart that I convene today’s hearing to examine the rise of extremism and violence against LGBTQI+ people in the United States.

Last month, a person with an AR-15-style assault rifle entered Club Q—a nightclub that served as a haven for LGBTQI+ people in the Colorado Springs community—and opened fire on unsuspecting bar patrons and staff.

The attacker’s depravity robbed us of five innocent lives—Daniel Aston, Raymond Green Vance, Kelly Loving, Ashley Paugh, and Derrick Rump. More than a dozen people were injured in the rampage, and family members and loved ones who were left reeling have been forced to pick up the pieces. My heart breaks for those who endured this ruthless act of violence.

The Club Q shooting represents an attack on all sacred spaces for LGBTQI+ people across the country that offer the promise of community and refuge from rampant bigotry. In attacking Club Q, the shooter targeted the sense of safety among LGBTQI+ people across the country—a feeling of security to which we are all entitled.

The attack on Club Q—and the LGBTQI+ community—is not an isolated incident, but part of a broader trend of violence and intimidation across the country.

Earlier this month, a group of extremists appeared at a Lakeland, Florida arts festival featuring drag performances to harass and intimidate performers and attendees. The extremist group, whose faces were concealed by masks, carried a banner with anti-LGBTQI+ slurs and raised their arms in Nazi salutes.

And in my own community in New York City—home to Stonewall and the international capital of the LGBTQI+ rights movement—a man was arrested for throwing bricks at the window of a gay bar on four different occasions.

These actions are the culmination of years of anti-LGBTQI+ extremism that began in state houses across the country and spread to social media platforms before boiling over into the communities where we reside.

In 2018, Republicans in state governments across the country introduced 110 pieces of legislation targeting the health and safety of LGBTQI+ people. In the past legislative session, this number tripled to more than 340 pieces of anti-LGBTQI+ legislation.

These bills—which villainize LGBTQI+ people in classroom settings, and target health care for LGBTQI+ people, and more—directly threaten the freedom of LGBTQI+ people to live authentically and safely.

For example, one piece of legislation signed into law by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis prohibits teachers from even mentioning LGBTQI+ people in classrooms. This “Don’t Say Gay or Trans” law erases the existence of LGBTQI+ people and families and muzzles our nation’s brightest educators.

Within a month of Florida passing this legislation, two additional states passed similar bills. In total, 48 bills in more than 20 states have considered eliminating or suppressing LGBTQI+ people and history in school curricula.

Here in Congress, dozens of House Republicans have cosponsored federal legislation to prohibit federal funding for schools with curricula that affirms LGBTQI+ people.

And Republicans at every level of government have gone even further to villainize transgender people—targeting their ability to access necessary health care and restricting their freedom to participate as full members of our society.

These hateful pieces of legislation have fueled a dangerous rise in extreme anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric. Following the passage of Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay or Trans” law, vitriolic social media content accusing members of the LGBTQI+ community of being “groomers” skyrocketed by more than 400%.

The Committee received a video submission from Ms. Sarah Kate Ellis, the President and CEO of GLAAD—one of the nation’s leading LGBTQI+ media advocacy organizations—explaining the proliferation of anti-LGBTQI+ extremism across our media landscape and its relationship to the kind of violence we observed at Club Q. I’d like to play this [video](#) now.

As Republicans have fanned the flames of bigotry, Democrats have remained committed to protecting and advancing the health, safety, and rights of LGBTQI+ people.

Last year, House Democrats passed the [Equality Act](#)—landmark legislation that would enshrine protections against discrimination for LGBTQI+ people into law.

And this past June—to commemorate Pride Month—this Committee shepherded the [LGBTQI+ Data Inclusion Act](#) to House passage. This groundbreaking legislation would expand federal data collection efforts to improve our ability to understand and address the specific challenges facing LGBTQI+ people.

More than 200 House Republicans voted against each of these pieces of legislation.

As a longtime public servant, the fight for LGBTQI+ equality is one that has always been close to my heart. As a New York City Councilwoman serving the very community where the famous queer activist Edie Windsor resided, I was proud to introduce the first legislation recognizing domestic partnerships in New York State history.

Just last week, Congress took the historic step of protecting the right to same-sex marriage under federal law. But the work of ensuring that LGBTQI+ people can live authentically and safely is only just beginning.

Today, we will hear from some of the nation’s leading experts regarding the rise of anti-LGBTQI+ extremism, the damage it inflicts upon our communities, and the steps we must take to eliminate it.

I am pleased to welcome the new President of the Human Rights Campaign, Ms. Kelley Robinson, for her first appearance before Congress.

We will also hear directly from survivors of the violent Club Q attack. I am deeply grateful for the bravery of these individuals in recounting their horrific experiences. Their testimony will serve as a tremendous public service for their community and for our nation.

Let us honor them by recommitting to the bold action necessary to ensure that every person in the United States can experience the freedom to live authentically and safely—regardless of who they love or how they identify.

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