February 1, 2017

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

Over two years ago, faith leaders across the nation wrote to President Obama, urging him not to include a religion exemption in an Executive Order ending discrimination against LGBT people in hiring by federal contractors. As faith and civic leaders who affirm the sacred dignity and equal worth of every person, we are now writing to you. We urge you not to undermine these important protections against discrimination by adding a religious exemption to the Executive Order. For more than two years, it has been the law of the land. It would be harmful and wrong for you to change federal policy to sanction discrimination with tax-payer dollars. Furthermore, we urge you not to include religious exemptions that discriminate against LGBT people, women, and others in any federal policies.

In our democratic nation, public service—particularly when it is directly funded by the federal government—must be aligned with the constitutional principle that all people receive equal treatment under the law. Requiring those who receive public funding to adhere to non-discriminatory hiring practices not only abides by this principle, but also it is the right thing to do. Beyond that, it protects our laws from confusion and abuse. If contractors and others were allowed to opt out of certain laws, depending on their religious beliefs, we would soon see a morass of legal confusion and dispute.

In addition, if a religious exemption were added to President Obama’s Executive Order, the people who would suffer most are those who always suffer most when discrimination is allowed: individuals and communities that are already marginalized. Adding to their burden is the opposite of what public service can and should do—and betrays the values we stand for as people of faith and conscience.

Federal policies that allow for discrimination against LGBT people violate basic human rights and dignity, as well as the belief shared by millions of Americans—that LGBT people should not be treated as second-class citizens.

In a nation as diverse as the United States, the federal government must follow—and indeed, must model—equitable and fair employment practices. Our mutual commitment to the common good is best served by policies that prohibit discrimination based on factors that have no relation to job performance. We are better and stronger as a nation when hiring decisions are based on professional merit.

Our pluralistic nation is among the most religiously diverse and devout in the world. Each day we make progress on our journey toward “a more perfect union,” where all God’s children are treated with dignity and respect. Many forces help spur this progress. They include the courage of people who live openly as who they truly are; the witness of faith leaders who provide a compass for religious growth; the commitment of political leaders who help guide our nation toward a more just path; and the passage of laws and policies that ensure fair treatment for all.
We believe that the path to national unity lies in affirming the full equality and potential of every person. In the spirit of equality, fairness, and justice, we urge you not to add a discriminatory religious exemption to the Executive Order or to other federal policies.

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Rabbi Guy Austrian  
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Rabbi Ruth Gais

Rabbi Suri Krieger
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Cantor Bat-Ami Moses
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