June 13, 2019

Vote YES on Cicilline Amendment #95 to H.R. 2740, the minibus appropriations bill.

Dear Representative:

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) strongly urges you to vote YES on Cicilline Amendment #95 to H.R. 2740, the FY 2020 appropriations package. The ACLU will score the vote on this amendment.

Vote YES on Cicilline Amendment #95 (Division D, State Department, Foreign Operations and Other Programs)

This amendment would prohibit the State Department from spending funds on the creation of a “Commission on Unalienable Rights,” whose purpose is to advise the Secretary of State based on principles of “natural law and natural rights.” The latter are code words often used by the religious right to undermine the rights of women and LGBTQ people, and we believe the commission will be used to diminish longstanding U.S. principles and international legal obligations on civil and human rights.

The State Department announced the creation of the commission in the Federal Register on May 30, 2019. According to the notice, the purpose of the commission is “to provide the Secretary of State advice and recommendations concerning international human rights matters” and “fresh thinking about human rights discourse where such discourse has departed from our nation’s founding principles of natural law and natural rights.” It is clear from this language that the Commission is intended to redefine universal human rights and shift the State Department’s human rights work away from longstanding U.S. policy and international standards for the purpose of diminishing the rights of LGBTQ people, women, and other vulnerable populations.

Moreover, the commission appears to replicate the role of the State Department’s pre-existing, legally mandated Bureau of
Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), the department sub-agency responsible for advancing human rights in U.S. foreign policy. Accordingly, the commission would be a waste of taxpayer money and yet another initiative of the Trump Administration to roll back civil and human rights protections and historical global leadership on international human rights issues.

We urge you to vote YES on Rep. Cicilline’s amendment to prohibit funds for the Commission’s creation. Please reach out to Sonia Gill, ACLU senior legislative counsel, with any questions at (202) 675-2328 or sgill@aclu.org.

Sincerely,

Ronald Newman
National Political Director

Sonia Gill
Senior Legislative Counsel