

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 12, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio:

We write in recognition of your longstanding commitment to U.S. support for emerging democracies and the brave dissidents and human rights defenders who challenge authoritarianism across the globe. In a 2017 subcommittee hearing you chaired entitled *Democracy and Human Rights: The Case for U.S. Leadership*, you rightly stated that “support of emerging democracies should be a core U.S. national interest precisely because it is a national security imperative.”¹ It is with the same U.S. national security concerns that we urge you to retain the staff and programs administered by Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) in the re-organization of the Department.

The proposed reorganization of DRL raises serious concerns about the Department's prioritization of democracy and human rights and the role of DRL in advancing U.S. national security priorities—concerns that were the basis for Congress's bipartisan codification in statute an Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and the directive “to promote the increased observance of internationally recognized human rights by all countries” as a principal goal of U.S. foreign policy.² The proposed reorganization would result in a structural and substantive demotion of human rights promotion that runs counter to the spirit of the law and your personal legacy working on these issues.

To ensure the Department's continued leadership on democracy and human rights, we strongly recommend you maintain DRL's global grants functions and staff expertise. Over 80 percent of DRL's programs support human rights defenders working in closed, anti-democratic societies, including Cuba, China, Nicaragua, North Korea, Iran, Russia, Venezuela, and others which the Trump Administration has identified as adversaries of the U.S. DRL program personnel are subject matter and regional experts, many of whom worked side-by-side with pro-democracy activists and human rights defenders as implementing partners prior to joining the Department. Embassies across the globe rely on the office and their dedicated staff for their knowledge of and extensive contacts throughout local civil society, particularly in closed contexts where these individuals may be targeted for directly engaging with embassy staff. Any characterization of personnel in DRL or other J family offices as “prone to ideological capture and radicalism” is unfounded and being used as a red herring for diminishing the key functions of these offices.

¹ <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115shrg40671/html/CHRG-115shrg40671.htm>

² 22 USC §2304(a)(1)

Every policy and program implemented by DRL has been developed in close coordination with regional bureaus and with the explicit approval of senior officials appointed by each administration.

Neither the CN nor your recent testimony before Congress address how the Department will retain the subject matter expertise found in DRL. The CN is unclear whether any of the personnel in DRL offices proposed for elimination would transfer to regional bureaus to ensure adequate policy and program acumen continues to guide the Department's work on these important issues.

It is imperative that the human capital in DRL remains in DRL, both for the unique technical expertise of DRL staff and to ensure adequate compliance with the bureau's statutory roles and responsibilities, including administration of Global Magnitsky sanctions, 7031c visa restrictions, Leahy vetting, the annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and the implementation of \$100 million annually in foreign assistance directed by Congress to advance democracy and human rights globally. The proposed staffing reductions in the CN would significantly undermine the Department's capacity to administer these critical foreign policy tools and to meet its statutory obligations on human rights.

As you stated in the subcommittee hearing previously mentioned, "millions of people around the world who live in societies dominated by fear and oppression look to the United States of America to champion their cause to fully exercise their God-given rights." There are no greater champions more capable of advancing this noble cause than the dedicated staff in DRL. We need these champions in the Department.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



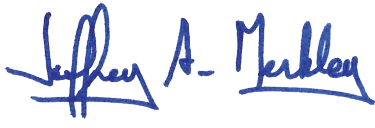
Richard Durbin
United States Senator



Christopher Coons
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Cory Booker
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator