

MEDIA ALERT



National Advocacy
for Local LGBTQH Communities

March 1, 2015

An open letter from LGBTQ organizations in the United States regarding the epidemic violence that LGBTQ people, particularly transgender women of color, have experienced in 2015.

We appear to be in a moment of crisis in LGBTQ communities. Unfortunately, this is not new: our movement was born out of a response to violence and police raids, and trans women of color were at the forefront of this resistance. Violence remains a life or death issue for far too many in our communities.

[The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs \(NCAVP\)](#) has responded to 14 LGBTQ homicides in 2015. To the best of NCAVP's knowledge, eight of the incidents have been [intimate partner, family or stalking violence-related](#) and six have been [hate or police violence-related](#). One homicide appears to be either hook-up violence or intimate partner violence but the facts of the case are still not clear.

Seven of these were homicides of transgender women of color:

- **Kentucky:** [Papi Edwards](#), a transgender woman of color, who was shot on January 9th in an apparent [hate violence homicide](#).
- **Virginia:** [Lamia Beard](#) was found shot to death on January 17th in an apparent [hate violence homicide](#).
- **Texas:** [Ty Underwood](#) was found shot to death early Monday morning on January 26th in an apparent [hate violence homicide](#).
- **California:** [Yazmin Vash Payne](#) was discovered fatally stabbed to death on Saturday, January 31st, in an apparent [intimate partner violence homicide](#); Payne's boyfriend, Ezekiel Dear, has been arrested and booked for suspicion of murder in connection with her death.
- **California:** [Taja Gabrielle de Jesus](#) was discovered stabbed to death on a stairwell in San Francisco's Bayview District on Sunday, February 1st in an apparent [hate violence homicide](#).
- **Louisiana:** [Penny Proud](#) was found fatally shot on February 10th in an apparent [hate violence homicide](#).
- **Florida:** [Kristina Gomez Reinwald](#) was found unresponsive in her home on February 15th and police are investigating this as an [intimate partner violence homicide](#).

One of these homicides involved a person with as yet an unconfirmed sexual orientation and gender identity:

- **Ohio:** An individual with the last name [Golec](#) was allegedly stabbed by their father on February 13th in an apparent [family violence homicide](#).

Six of these homicides involved lesbian, gay or queer identified people:

- **New York:** [Randy J. Bent](#) was found stabbed and set on fire in an apparent pick up violence homicide on March 8, 2015.
- **Massachusetts:** [Omar Mendez](#) was found stabbed to death in his home in an apparent intimate partner violence homicide on February 15th.
- **Massachusetts:** [Lisa Trubnikova](#) was allegedly killed on February 5th in an apparent stalking homicide.
- **Colorado:** [Jessie Hernandez](#) was killed by the police on January 26th.
- **Georgia:** [Ashley Belle](#) was killed on January 26th and her partner was charged with the crime in an apparent intimate partner violence homicide.
- **New York:** [Cassandra Keels](#) was killed on January 18th in an apparent intimate partner violence homicide and her girlfriend has been arrested.

In NCAVP's most recent [Hate Violence Report](#), almost 90% of all homicide victims were people of color. Further, almost three-quarters (72%) of these homicide victims were transgender women, and more than two-thirds (67%) were transgender women of color. In NCAVP's most recent [Intimate Partner Violence Report](#), LGBTQ and HIV-affected people of color made up the majority of survivors – and have for the past three years. The 2013 report also found that LGBTQ and HIV-affected people of color were more likely to experience IPV incidents in public spaces, perhaps an indication that LGBTQ people of color's lives are more policed and harassed in the public sphere.

Violence is complex, and requires multiple strategies to prevent and end it. This includes prevention and awareness efforts to change our culture, more social support for transgender people, and addressing poverty, discrimination, housing instability, criminalization, family separation, unemployment, and trauma. It is no longer simply enough to say “transphobic, biphobic, and homophobic violence and homicides are wrong.”

If vulnerability to violence occurs at the intersections of people's identities, so, then, should our responses that will prevent this violence. We cannot expect a singular response to address or prevent this violence. Our responses must be multi-dimensional and contemporaneous. We, the undersigned organizations, are committed to the safety and self-determination of LGBTQ people from all communities, and to dismantling the conditions that support violence in all its forms.

We believe the following actions must be taken to stop this violence:

- Public officials, community leaders, and the public at large must acknowledge LGBTQ lives are valuable, and that transgender women of color exist, and must speak out against violence when it occurs.
- Public officials and policymakers should act swiftly to address the day-to-day discrimination that LGBTQ people, particularly transgender people of color, experience, and the impact this discrimination has, including increased rates of poverty, housing instability, unemployment and trauma.
- Law enforcement and media must respectfully and accurately identify victims of violence with names and pronouns in line with their current gender identity.

- Law enforcement and the media must stop criminalizing LGBTQ people, particularly transgender women of color, in their deaths by reporting on past alleged criminal activity or showing pictures that suggest criminality.

We also need to take action to address this violence. Public awareness ads, such as AVP's [Born to Be Campaign](#), can show positive, affirming images of transgender and gender non-conforming folks. The [National Black Justice Coalition \(NBJC\) 100 Black LGBTQ/SGL Emerging Leaders to Watch Campaign](#) is working to empower young Black leaders to mobilize in their communities to make positive changes throughout the nation. Programs like [Audre Lorde Project's TransJustice](#) and [Safe OUTSide the System Collective](#) in New York City, [Casa Ruby](#) in Washington, DC, and [BreakOUT!](#) in New Orleans, and the [Translatina Coalition](#), to name a few, lift up the voices of trans women of color and respects and supports their leadership. Non-discrimination protections, in employment, housing, public accommodations and other areas are critical to protecting LGBT people legally.

We commit, as LGBTQ organizations throughout the United States, to take on this work. We commit to holding public leaders and institutions accountable for their response to this violence. We commit to keep speaking the names of the victims – and those of the survivors – and encourage and support the leadership of transgender women of color as those most impacted by this violence. We commit to doing everything we can to end this violence.

Signed,

Believe Out Loud
 BiNet USA
 Center For Black Equity, Inc.
 CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
 Equality Federation
 Family Equality Council
 FORGE
 Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders
 GetEQUAL
 GLAAD
 GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality
 GLSEN
 Human Rights Campaign
 Immigration Equality
 International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC)
 Lambda Legal
 Movement Advancement Project.
 National Black Justice Coalition
 National Center for Lesbian Rights
 National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP)
 National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce®
 National LGBTQ Task Force
 National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA)
 NCAVP Movement Building Committee:
 API Chaya
 BreakOUT!
 BSEEDZ

Casa Ruby
Colorado Anti-Violence Program
Disability Justice Collective
LaGender Inc.
Native Youth Sexual Health Network
Racial Justice Action Center
Ruth Ellis Center
Solutions NOT Punishment Coalition
Trans(forming)
Out & Equal Workplace Advocates
Pride at Work, AFL-CIO
SAGE
Southerners on New Ground (SONG)
The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals
The Pride Network
Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund
True Colors Fund