



**National Center for
Transgender Equality**

MEDIA RELEASE

June 17, 2003

List of press contacts attached at end

Transgender Leaders Laud Unified Voice of GLBT Community in Federal Legislative Efforts

The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and the Transgender Law & Policy Institute (TLPI) hosted a conference call on Tuesday, June 17 for GLBT media to discuss recent efforts to include transgender people in federal non-discrimination legislation. Also covered was the recently developed consensus and solidarity around transgender inclusion in all aspects of the LGBT movement.

After brief statements by TLPI and NCTE, seven transgender leaders with experience advocating for transgender civil rights at the federal, state and local levels answered questions. A list of participants and contact information is attached.

Statement by Paisley Currah, Board member of the Transgender Law and Policy Institute

I'm Paisley Currah. I'm with the Transgender Law & Policy Institute, which is a national organization based in New York that brings experts and advocates together to work on law and policy initiatives to advance transgender equality. Some of our board members have been working on securing protections for transgender people in federal legislation for the past decade. We've convened this conference call with the National Center for Transgender Equality today because we believe this is a watershed moment in the struggle for transgender rights.

As you all are well aware, trans activists from all over the country have been aggressively lobbying for years to get gender identity and expression included in ENDA. And we've had some notable successes: over the past decade, many of the national GLBT legal and political groups have gradually come on board and begun to voice support for that effort.

And, as you know, there have been times that this has been an extremely contentious issue in the community. But this year marks the first time that virtually the entire community spoke with a unified voice in asking Congressional sponsors to amend ENDA to include transgender people.

This spring, over 20 national GLBT organizations, including the Human Rights

Campaign, NGLTF, the ACLU, all of the national legal organizations, PFLAG, Pride at Work, LLEGÓ, GenderPAC, the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum, and others either signed statements, sent letters, or participated in face to face meetings with the lead Congressional sponsors of ENDA and voiced their strong and unqualified support for transgender inclusion in the bill.

As you know, NGLTF in particular has long been supportive of this effort and was one of the first national groups to publicly embrace and advocate for transgender people. This year, the Board of Directors of the Human Rights Campaign empowered its staff, led by Elizabeth Birch, to make the case for including gender identity to ENDA's lead co-sponsors. This is a tremendously important development. Among other things, it marks the first time that the entire community has approached the lead sponsors to endorse a unified, inclusive bill. We believe that this has forever altered the political landscape of our national movement. With HRC and virtually all the other national GLBT groups on board, we believe it is only a matter of time before any federal legislation dealing with gay rights will as a matter of course also include transgender people.

Reaching this milestone is a result of two main factors. One is the relentless efforts of transgender activists at the state and local level to educate, agitate, and insist on being heard and included. The other is the recognition on the part of many gay people that they are profoundly affected by gender-based discrimination, and that when protections for transgender people are left out, many gay people are left unprotected as well.

Before you hear from my colleague Mara Keisling, I would like to return for a moment to how this translates into practical politics at the Congressional level, which is a large part of what we wanted to communicate to you on this call. As I noted, this is the first time that HRC and the other national GLBT groups have approached the lead sponsors to ask for a unified bill. Since this is the first year we have presented a truly unified front, it's not surprising that the request did not meet with immediate success. Although it is not yet entirely clear, it seems likely that ENDA will be reintroduced without gender identity this session.

Nonetheless, we are looking forward to working with Members of Congress and national advocacy groups to educate Congress on transgender issues. We feel confident that the unified efforts of the entire GLBT community over the next few years will persuade federal legislators of the need for and importance of a non-discrimination law that protects all gay, lesbian, bisexual people and transgender people from discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

With that goal in mind, we are already working on a new federal legislative initiative that reflects the new unity in the GLBT community. We and other transgender activists are working closely with the national GLBT groups to create a new legislative vehicle that will include both sexual orientation and gender identity. We believe this bill will garner the support of a vast majority of people in our community. It will enable us to build political support in Congress. Most importantly, we believe it will eventually result in the enactment of legislation that will protect everyone in our community.

Another sign of the growing strength of the transgender community is the fact that we also now have a national advocacy group lobbying for transgender issues in D.C., the National Center for Transgender Equality. I am going to turn things over now to the very

talented Executive Director of the National Center, Mara Keisling, and then we will open this up for questions.

Statement by Mara Keisling, Executive Director of the National Center for Transgender Equality

Thank you Paisley.

I am Mara Keisling, Executive Director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, a new Washington DC-based organization working for the equality and empowerment of transgender people. Thank you for taking the time to be with us this afternoon.

The movement for transgender civil rights has advanced tremendously over the past few years. In 2002 alone, fourteen local jurisdictions added discrimination protections for people based on gender identity or expression. And so far this year, six local jurisdictions and the state of New Mexico have passed transgender anti-discrimination protections.

Certainly we owe these victories largely to grassroots transgender activists, but increasingly, throughout the country, these activists are no longer fighting alone. Coalitions are being built with dedicated lesbian, gay and bisexual activists.

At the state and local level, the assumption is now that LGBT people will stand together and pursue rights for all of us—together.

The good news today is that this unity of purpose is now apparent in Washington as well.

This year, for the first time, Congress has heard a unified message from at least 24 national groups asking for transgender inclusion in ENDA. And these groups were joined by dozens of state groups making the same case for protecting everyone.

Unfortunately, it seems likely that ENDA will be introduced shortly without the addition of gender identity and expression. Yet we are greatly heartened by the decision of so many of our allied organizations to express unequivocal support for our cause to ENDA's lead sponsors in Congress.

We are now at the point in our national LGBT movement where we are no longer fighting each other for transgender inclusion; we are fighting together for equal rights for all of us—lesbian, gay, bisexual AND transgender.

Regardless of the decisions made in Congress this year, lawmakers cannot help but hear our collective message. We are convinced that it is inevitable that anti-discrimination protections will eventually pass for all LGBT people.

As we step up our educational efforts, Members of Congress will quickly come to understand what is now commonly understood by much of the public and an increasingly unified LGBT movement— all of us deserve our rights, need our rights and will win our rights.

But regardless of how ENDA is worded in this 108th Congress, conversations have already begun to develop new legislation – legislation that can energize us again, that can win in Congress and that will protect all LGBT people from discrimination.

NCTE is proud to be exploring the possibilities of this approach with the Transgender Law and Policy Institute as well as our other allies like the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, PFLAG, Pride at Work, HRC and so many others. We are proud to be standing side by side with our lesbian, gay, bisexual and other allies, educating the public, Congress and each other about our lives and our rights.

Thank you very much.

We will now open the discussion up to questions. Each of you should have received a list of the transgender leaders who are on this call. You may ask questions of specific people or ask us all and Paisley and I will play traffic cops.

The Transgender Law & Policy Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to engaging in effective advocacy for transgender people in our society. The TLPI brings experts and advocates together to work on law and policy initiatives designed to advance transgender equality.
<http://www.transgenderlaw.org>

The National Center for Transgender Equality is a Washington-based national transgender organization working for the empowerment and equality of transgender people in the United States.

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