

National Association of Social Workers

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Trans Day of Remembrance

Calling the Social Work Profession to Honor the Lost Lives of Trans people and Be in Solidarity With the Trans Community

In unison with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Committee and the Coalition on Race, Diversity and Intersectionality, the National Association of Social Workers – NYC Chapter observes Trans Day of Remembrance in solace and in honor of trans people who have lost their lives to violence perpetuated by transphobia¹, cissexism² and racism.

To date, 22 transgender or gender non-conforming individuals have been killed this year alone in the United States; 19 of which were trans people of color. This is the highest reported rate of homicides of transgender people in the country since the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) began tracking this information and does not include unreported killings. Trans people, in particular trans women of color, are at the intersection of the most marginalized and oppressed identities in our society. According to the 2012 National Transgender Discrimination Survey, trans people are among the most at risk for hate violence, including physical and sexual violence. Transgender youth in schools are also targeted in the education system with youth “in grades K-12 reporting alarming rates of harassment (78%), physical assault (35%) and sexual violence (12%)”³ The survey also found that due to these forms of violence, 41% of trans people have attempted at some point to take their lives.

It is important to note that trans people are also some of the most economically disadvantaged in the country. The National Transgender Discrimination Survey also found that, “respondents lived in extreme poverty and were nearly four times more likely to have a household income of less than \$10,000/year compared to the general population”³.

When race was factored in the report, it found that “transgender people of color were 6.2 times more likely to experience police violence when compared with other survivors” of police violence. In fact, transgender “people of color in general fare worse than white participants across the board, with African American transgender respondents faring far worse than all others in most areas examined.”³ As it relates to the criminalization of trans people, this trend highlights the importance of social workers who work with law enforcement to encourage that guidelines are adopted which mandate

police officers to interact with trans people in a respectful manner, and that allegations of hate crimes be fully investigated and reported for accurate data collection.

Trans people are increasingly persecuted across systems in this country and in this city. Because we are committed to battling against social injustice and structural racism we must engage in honest self-reflection. It is important to acknowledge how cisgender⁴ social workers, including heterosexual, lesbian, gay and bisexual social workers have been complicit in perpetuating and allowing transphobia to take the lives of those who have been killed simply for being who they are. It is equally important to recognize that the social work profession can and must do more to be inclusive of and care for trans social workers.

As a profession we must:

- Recognize that we are called by our profession's Code of Ethics to address oppression and advocate for social justice. Outlined in section 1.05(c): "social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical disability."
- Recognize that oppression against members of the Transgender community are violations of the UN Declaration on Human Rights, Articles 2, 5, 6 and 7⁵
- Promote the leadership of transgender social workers in our profession and in elected offices.
- Advocate for the passage of legislation such as the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act (GENDA) here in New York State and the Equality Act in the United States Congress
- Educate ourselves on the issues of the transgender community and how to serve and advocate with transgender people in the education, healthcare, employment, housing, criminal justice, immigration systems etc.
- Reflect on our biases, prejudices and challenge them while being mindful of how we interact and work with transgender clients and colleagues.
- Listen to the stories of trans people, how they choose to identify themselves, their struggles and stories of survival.

We observe November 20th as Trans Day of Remembrance. On this day we remember and grieve for trans people who are detained in prisons, detention centers, and psychiatric hospitals. We remember trans people who are homeless, displaced and serve in the military. We remember trans youth and elders and trans people of color around the world, in this country and in this city. We especially remember and mourn trans people who have been killed, Rest in Power.

Trans Day of Remembrance was started in 1998, when a transgender woman, Rita Hester was killed. But the killing of transgender people began much before 1998 and it continues today. Simultaneously, we need to acknowledge and lift the power, resistance and resilience of trans people. As we work to combat various systems of oppression, helping trans social workers and clients to heal, we must celebrate the courage, leadership and grassroots organizing that trans people have engaged in. As we lift these collectives we remind social workers and students who identify as trans that NASW-NYC is your professional organization as well and we thank you for your contribution to the profession. NASW-NYC joins in solidarity with the trans community to confront the injustices that have occurred for too long because as some trans people have said "silence is violence" and we say no more!

We call on NASW's national and chapter leaders to **JOIN US** in the work of battling against transphobia in all of its manifestations and reclaiming our humanity.

¹ transphobia – “Fear or hatred of transgender people; transphobia is manifested in a number of ways, including violence, harassment and discrimination” (Gender Equity Resource Center)

² cissexism – “prejudice and discrimination against people who are not cisgender. It is closely related to transhatred, but focuses more on the ‘rightness’ of the cisgender experience rather than the ‘wrongness’ of the trans experience and is generally used to refer to more subtle prejudice and discrimination against non-cisgender people” (Anger is Justified)

³ Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey

⁴ cisgender – “people who feel there is a match between their assigned sex and the gender they feel themselves to be. You are cisgender if your birth certificate says you're male and you identify yourself as a man or if your birth certificate says you're female and you identify as a woman” (Atlantic)

⁵ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948, 217 A (III), available at: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

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