

MEDIA RELEASE

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HISTORIC VICTORY: WELFARE PROCEDURE APPROVED TO ADDRESS DISCRIMINATION AGAINST TRANS AND GENDER NON CONFORMING PEOPLE, BRINGING NYC CLOSER TO BEING INCLUSIVE FOR ALL NEW YORKERS. NEW YORK CITY HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION (HRA) APPROVES PROCEDURE FOR SERVING TRANS AND GENDER NON CONFORMING CLIENTS

(New York City, February 5, 2010) – TransJustice of the Audre Lorde Project, Housing Works, Queers for Economic Justice, and the Sylvia Rivera Law Project will announce a victory for their Welfare Justice Campaign at a press conference on **February 10, 2010 at 10AM** at the Housing Works Bookstore, 126 Crosby Street (between Prince St. and East Houston), Manhattan, NY. On December 23, 2009 -- after five years of organizing by Trans and Gender Non Conforming communities -- the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) passed a procedure to stop rampant transphobic discrimination and harassment in New York City's welfare system. Speakers include Jane Corbett, Executive Deputy Commissioner of HRA, Erik Bottcher, the LGBT Community Liaison for NYC Council Speaker Christine Quinn and members of the Welfare Justice Campaign.

Transgender and Gender Non Conforming people face extreme, abusive, unjust discrimination when trying to access government benefits in New York City. Some transgender people are denied the ability to even apply for benefits and told to come back when they "dress more like a girl, or boy." Since 2005, Trans and Gender Non-Conforming (TGNC) communities in New York City have been fighting back by urging HRA to address the widespread Transphobia, discrimination, and harassment that Trans and Gender Non-Conforming people in New York City face when accessing public assistance. In 2005 HRA and a Citizen Advisory Transgender Sub Committee developed Best Practice Protocols for Serving Trans and Gender Non Conforming Clients (the new procedure is based on this document). Unfortunately, these protocols sat on the shelf for years and were never implemented nor adopted by HRA.

Jane Corbett, Executive Deputy Commissioner of HRA and Kavita Pawria, HRA Director of Office of Refugee and Immigrant Affairs have been working along side community groups for the last two years to develop a HRA procedure on serving Trans and Gender Non Conforming communities. On December 23rd, 2009, after years of organizing and advocacy by the community, HRA Commissioner Robert Doar finally approved the new procedure. HRA Executive Deputy Commissioner Jane Corbett stated that, "After much cooperation both within the agency and with community leaders outside of HRA, the procedure was finalized and distributed to staff last December. We expect that this reinforcement of City rules will improve our customer service."

According to Mya Vazquez, of TransJustice of the Audre Lorde Project, "Due to wide spread prejudice in order to survive we're forced to apply for public benefits, yet when we go to welfare centers, we're harassed, jeered at, and faced with discrimination because of our gender identities and/or expression." She states that, "The 'don't ask, don't tell campaign' has taken up so much national attention and resources, yet the issues of daily survival that Trans and Gender Non Conforming People of Color deal with go unnoticed".

Tracy Bumpus of Housing Works states, "This procedure is important because the greatest fundamental human right is to be free to love and live as our minds and hearts guide us. But for Trans and Gender Non Conforming people what is the value of freedom if we are afraid to seek the life sustaining services offered by HRA because we are discriminated against, made fun of and made to feel less than human. Hopefully this procedure will change the outdated ways of thinking that people seem unable to let go of."

While approval of the HRA procedure is a major win, it is only the beginning. Reina Gossett, of Queers for Economic Justice states, "The approval of this procedure is a major victory for Trans and Gender Non Conforming communities, however we still have far to go. In the past, similar city policies have failed in the training phase using inadequate curriculum and trainers lacking cultural competence. We need everyone's support to insure that all HRA employees are trained on the new procedure and that our communities are central to the development and implementation of these trainings."

The Audre Lorde Project (ALP) is a Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Two-Spirit, Trans and Gender Non Conforming People of Color Community Organizer Center in NYC. TransJustice, a project of ALP, is a Trans and Gender Non-Conforming People of Color organizing group.

Housing Works provides homeless and low-income New Yorkers living with HIV/AIDS and their families with housing, meals, medical care, drug treatment, social support, employment opportunities and other lifesaving services.

Queers for Economic Justice is a progressive organization committed to promoting economic justice in a context of sexual and gender liberation.

The Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP) works to guarantee that all people are free to self-determine their gender identity and expression, regardless of income or race, and without facing harassment, discrimination, or violence.

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