



## Challenges and Advances in Transgender Rights

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While accurate statistics are hard to come by, there is little doubt that transgender Americans are subjected to more discrimination and harassment in employment, housing, education and health care, in addition to more violence, than any other group. The transgender community suffers from disproportionate rates of unemployment, poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, HIV and incarceration. Transgender youth are overly represented in out-of-home care settings. Transgender individuals are estimated to be five times more likely than others to attempt suicide. And, as the recent, brutal murder of Jorge Steven Lopez Mercado in Puerto Rico attests, hate crimes against transgender individuals continue unabated.

Addressing these critical problems has been a core part of Lambda Legal's docket and public policy work for many years. Lambda Legal currently is pursuing a complaint against a Philadelphia youth detention facility on behalf of a 17-year-old transgender girl who was physically attacked by other residents and abused by staff every day for almost a year and a half (see *In My Own Words*, page 16, for her story). We defeated an attempt to dismiss our federal equal protection lawsuit on behalf of Vandy Beth Glenn, who was fired from her position with the Georgia legislature after informing her supervisor of her forthcoming gender transition. We continue to press our freedom of expression case on behalf of K.K. Logan, an Indiana student blocked from attending prom for wearing a gown appropriate to his gender identity. We also await a ruling in our challenge to a Wisconsin statute barring necessary medical care to transgender individuals in prison. And, with our partners at the National Association of Social Workers and the Council of Social Work Education, we are facilitating improved training of service providers working with gender non-conforming youth in the foster care, juvenile justice and homeless services systems.

Fortunately, we are beginning to see important signs of progress. Transgender people enjoyed a huge victory in October when President Obama signed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, the nation's first federal law expressly protecting the civil rights of LGBT people. Akron, Cleveland, Nashville, Salt Lake City, and Tampa this year joined 12 states, the District of Columbia and more than 100 local governments in adopting express prohibitions on employment discrimination based on gender identity and expression. Voters in Kalamazoo, Michigan and Gainesville, Florida rejected attempts to prevent such laws from going into effect in their communities. And in court battles in California and Montgomery County, Maryland, Lambda Legal helped defend existing laws protecting transgender people from discrimination against right-wing attacks.

Nonetheless, there clearly is much more to do. In particular, as our client Vandy Beth Glenn told the House Committee on Education and Labor in her October testimony in support of the pending Employment Non-Discrimination Act, transgender people "need a federal law that clearly and unmistakably bans gender identity discrimination."

Lambda Legal is delighted to have hired M. Dru Levasseur as our new Transgender Rights Attorney to help champion the work ahead. Dru's extensive experience advancing the civil rights of transgender people ensures that we will continue to be leaders in facing these challenges and achieving the equal justice transgender people deserve.

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